"THE SHOW WINDOWS OF A STATE": A COMPARATIVE STUDY ON CLASSIFICATION OF MICHIGAN, INDIANA, AND OHIO STATE PARKS

Brittany N. Bayless

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Committee:
Dr. Edmund Danziger, Jr., Advisor
Dr. Walter Grunden
ABSTRACT

Dr. Edmund Danziger, Jr., Advisor

State parks constitute a valuable portion of the United States’ national, regional, state, local, and private lands devoted to the conservation and preservation of nature and American culture. State parks also represent state values through their display of special natural, cultural, and historic characteristics. Thus, it is important to consider how citizens and policy makers value their natural areas at the state level. This study maintains that there are fifty different state park systems in the United States. Each system and park represents different ideals and attitudes toward the use of natural resources and unique wilderness areas. These sentiments convey state and public values of recreational areas.

This thesis examines how the creation and organization of Maumee Bay State Park in Ohio, Indiana Dunes State Park, and William C. Sterling State Park in Michigan reflect different state and public sentiments toward the use of natural resources and wilderness areas. This study argues that each state government’s priorities, as transmitted through their representative Departments of Natural Resources (DNRs), shaped the histories of specific state parks. State DNRs hold notions of what a state park should be, how it should be administered, and what its obligations are to the public. These beliefs differ from state to state and are apparent in levels of park development such as landscape alteration, facility construction, and a range of recreational opportunities. To measure differences prevalent in these state parks, this study uses a developmental continuum to
classify each of the three parks. This scale not only gauges state views of nature, but land use priorities conveyed by different DNR mission statements and goals.

Ultimately, state parks can be classified under one of three levels of development established by this study’s state park development continuum. This classification presents the field of environmental history, which has been dominated by literature on national parks, with new, original work on state parks.
I dedicate this project to my family and friends.
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INTRODUCTION

So, McClintock suggests, you should go to the park in the right state of mind, to look, to feel, to put yourself in nature’s hands. Leave your philosophies behind, make your mind a blank sheet; nature will write upon it…Leave sports behind, for a while. Be alone a little. Don’t talk much. You can talk later, after you have come back from a stroll. Always walk, where you can. And slowly. Get into the silent places and sit on a fallen log. Listen to the birds. Look at the wide landscape and then shift your view to the small things—organic, inorganic. Don’t compare what you are seeking with something somewhere else. Nature never repeats, parrotlike. Don’t look, in Nebraska, for what that state does not possess. Each spot of earth has its own special beauty. You may think the flat plain, or the desert, lacking in thrill. You will find yourself mistaken, if you remain awhile and give yourself up to what is here.

Freeman Tilden ¹

Envision a stretch of rolling sand dunes, miniature mountains of fine beige grains that have been shaped by thousands of years of ravaging wind and water. Lining the tops of these hills are beach grasses, and resting between are intermittent forest and marsh communities. Now look beyond the dunes to the beach. On the shore, out of reach of charging waves, lie driftwood, seaweed, and an assortment of shells and smooth stones. Then, after taking in the more immediate scenery, turn around and take in its surrounding landscape. The dunes turn into forests, but its stretch, unlike the clear blue water’s, is cut off. Roads carve the once-dominating woods and smoke stacks protrude from cleared areas. Even more apparent is the place where seemingly-unaltered forest communities and dunes end, and industry begins. What is keeping industry and civilization from extending their reach into the dunes and onto the beach? A simple fence marking the Indiana Dunes State Park’s property line.²

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² The significance of property, the power of ownership, is represented by the fence’s presence. Unlike the fences European settlers constructed to keep wilderness out, today’s conservationists construct fences to do the
Industry and conservation exist with competing interests because of conflicting views of how natural resources and wilderness areas should be used. During European settlement of North America in the seventeenth century, most believed that land untouched by human development was land wasted. Fortunately, later individuals like Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry David Thoreau exalted the “romantic” or aesthetic and spiritual value of the natural world. As a result, the similarly-minded naturalist John Muir called for wilderness preservation during the late 1800s, initiating the United States’ first national movement for natural protection. This primary movement included the famous debate over whether to dam Hetch Hetchy Valley in Yosemite National Park as a solution to San Francisco’s chronic water shortage. Formation of two groups resulted: the wilderness preservationists, led by Muir, and the utilitarian-conservationists. To Muir’s dismay, the valley was dammed as Gifford Pinchot, whom Theodore Roosevelt appointed as his first Director of the United States Forest Service, endorsed a system of conservation also known as utilitarianism. This model was based on English writer Jeremy Bentham’s phrase, “the greatest good for the greatest number.” Twentieth century Progressives viewed “unregulated destruction of the nation’s forests and waterways an enormous waste,” and believed that “scientific management was the answer.” Therefore, Roosevelt endorsed federal regulation to manage the nation’s remaining wilderness lands with a business-like efficiency that facilitated

do not hallucinate.

opposite: keep development at bay. In his book Changes in the Land: Indians, Colonists, and the Ecology of New England, environmental historian William Cronon uncovers how Euro-American settlement and eventual dominance, as a shift from Indian control, affected the ecological and human communities of New England. His main purpose is to show the cultural and ecological consequences of what he calls the “frontier process.” As part of this, Cronon describes Euro-American construction of fences as the replacement for ecological habitats and forests. Settlers viewed the boundary markers as a sign of “progress,” and symbol of the New World’s transformation into and reproduction of the Old World. Cronon contends that because settlers took initiative in prescribing specific purposes for plots of land and separated crops from animals and local natives, fences became a visual symbol of how the land had been “improved.” Further, Cronon stresses the significance of fences as being a division of territory into defined functions and purposes, marking settlement, economic activities, and ecological relationships. This view is important in considering how Americans developed their relationships and views of the environment. Early settlers worked toward developing land; however, at the end of the twentieth century there was a shift to preserve it, somewhat changing the purpose and function of fences, as mentioned in the text, Cronon, Changes in the Land: Indians, Colonists, and the Ecology of New England (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 2003), ix, 126-38.
what was deemed as fair and “wise use.” 3 Ultimately, this encouraged creation of federal and state governing bodies for public lands. Without the regulating agencies and an emerging environmental conscious, many American parks would not exist. The United States’ first coordinated federal and state preservation-conservation effort led to the state park idea. 4

On January 10, 1921, Stephen T. Mather called to order a meeting that would determine the future of these parks. Mather, a businessman and conservationist from Chicago and the first Director of the National Parks Service (NPS), had conceived of and developed the conference in a mere two months. Nearly 200 participants congregated in Des Moines, Iowa, that January to partake in the first “National Conference on Parks.” It was to become an annual event devoted to discussion of state parks. 5 Mather’s intentions were to encourage conference participants to develop “a large number of state parks.” 6 Here, Colonel Richard Lieber of Indiana, first Director

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2 The idea of utilitarianism stems from English writer Jeremy Bentham (1748-1832), who created the phrase “the greatest good for the greatest number.” John Stuart Mill (1806-1873) and others adopted the concept. Gifford Pinchot, first director of the United States Forest Service, and his mentor Theodore Roosevelt endorsed the idea in early American conservation efforts. Twentieth century Progressives viewed “unregulated destruction of the nation’s forests and waterways as an enormous waste and they believed that converting the nation’s wealth into vast personal fortunes was undemocratic and immoral. Scientific management was the answer. Government would apply a business-like efficiency to the development of resources and guarantee fair and wise use.” Thus, utilitarianism expressed a political philosophy and a professional ethic that the United States Forest Service has upheld since Pinchot and Roosevelt initiated it in the early 1900s. This form of conservation focused on wise-use, which is different from wilderness preservation. It is geared toward total protection of natural environments—with no use, “Pinchot and Utilitarianism,” United States Forest Service, 2006 http://www.fs.fed.us/greatestgood/press/mediakit/facts/pinchot.shtml?sub3 (accessed 6 March 2006).

4 One of the first federal efforts to protect the steadily-vanishing American wilderness was the national park. Early values placed on land by European settlers eventually led to the creation of the first national park, Yellowstone, in 1872. Subsequently, with the enactment of the National Park Service in 1916 they also established a federal regulating agency. 4 By the twentieth century, federal, state, and local governing bodies made a variety of preserved and restored environments available. They ranged from national parks to city parks, thousands of acres to a few. No matter the size, these areas are an encapsulation of American heritage. Although, hiding behind the aesthetic facades of parks is true ingenuity: the public domain. While these areas of land are protected by the federal government and provided for every American’s pleasure, equally, it is the public domain that holds special importance because it is almost exclusive to the United States. In Europe many early garden-parks, forests, and hunting preserves were private. Additionally, establishing rights of common ownership insinuates responsibility. Thus, acting as a symbol of a young nation, public parks are a representation of early American heritage, life, and sustainability, Roderick Nash, Wilderness and the American Mind 4th ed. (Yale University Press, 2001), 731; Ney C. Landrum, The State Park Movement in America (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2004).

5 Landrum, 1-2, 74-89; see also Tilden.

6 In 1921, only nineteen states had established state parks. This led to misinterpretation and the conference slogan, “A State Park Every Hundred Miles.” As Director of the NPS, Mather realized how important state parks
of the Indiana Department of Conservation, became known for his remark, “state parks are meant to be the show windows of a state.” This coincided with Mather’s agenda to create a list of criteria for preserved areas which would ensure their splendor. The goal of establishing park models in each state was laid out, and after three days the conference ended.  

One of the most important conference developments was an agreement to standardize state park legislation. With a premise that called for every level of government to become involved, the conference’s resolution stated:

To facilitate such acquirement we recommend the appointment of a special committee to study the park laws of the several states and to confer with the Executive Committee of the National Conference of Commissioners on Uniform State Laws with a view to preparation and presentation of model drafts.  

This policy implementation on the state level in the 1920s, as suggested in this statement, conveyed the strong American desire to conserve nature. More importantly, it showed how states took control of their land and created their own conservation systems with an emphasis on parks. During the surge of park creation that followed the first National Conference on State Parks in 1921, state park programs were quick to explore different philosophies, administration and maintenance objectives, and recreational activities. Today, American park users essentially have fifty park systems from which to choose.  

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were, yet how impractical this idea would be. In 1921, only 19 states had established state parks, Tilden, v, 8; Landrum, 82.

7 Tilden, 6; Indiana Dunes State Park: A History and Description, (The Department of Conservation, State of Indiana, 1930), 37; Landrum, 85.

8 Landrum, 85.

9 The Conference’s preamble stated, “That it is incumbent upon our governments, local, county, state and national, to continue to acquire sites suitable for recreation and the preservation of wild life, until eventually there shall be public parks within easy access of all the people of our nation,” National Conference of Parks, “Proceedings of the First National Conference on Parks, Des Moines, Iowa, January 10-12, 1921,” Landrum, 86-87.
Clearly, Americans realized that parks constituted a valuable portion of the United States’ national, state, regional, local, and private lands devoted to the conservation and preservation of nature and American culture. Popular European sentiments toward land that had been transplanted to North America by early settlement had provoked exploitative and apathetic attitudes, which evolved by the late 1800s into an environmental consciousness. Federal and state conservation legislation documented the nation’s growing concern for nature. The movement also provided United States citizens with state and national parks that preserved natural wonders, beautiful landscapes, and recreational opportunities that might otherwise have been lost. State parks also represent state values through their display of special natural, cultural, and historic characteristics. Thus, it is important to consider how citizens and policy makers value their natural areas at the state level.

Literature Review

The present study alludes to the overwhelming scholarship on national parks and suggests the importance of state parks, which are equally significant and greatly reflective of local and state sentiments toward natural environments. As a result of the limited resources available on state parks, this literature review is rather short.

10 An example of a federal action toward conservation consists of the previously-mentioned creation of Yellowstone. State acts are represented and encouraged by the National Conference on Parks, Landrum, 86-87.
11 There is a difference in the formulation and philosophy behind national and state parks. The former embraces vast areas distinguished by scenic attractions and natural wonders, and are preserved in their primitive state as much as possible for scientific, recreational and aesthetic means. State parks are protected areas that do not fit the national park criteria of size and activity. Nash comments on the early American perceptions upon discovery of Yellowstone as an established park in his article. He also discusses how Turner highlighted the American “wilderness—having it, being shaped by it and then almost eliminating it—soon provided the strongest reasons for appreciating Yellowstone and the subsequent national parks,” Nash, 731. Parks also became venues for displaying American history and educating society, John Henneberger, “The State of State Parks: State Park Beginnings,” The George Wright FORUM 17, no. 3 (2000): 9; “Finding Aid for the National Conference on State Parks (NCSP) Collection, 1989: History of the NCSP Organization,” National Recreation and Park Association, 2004 http://www.nrpa.org/content/default.aspx?documentId=731 (accessed 30 November 2004).
12 “Finding Aid for the National Conference on State Parks (NCSP) Collection.”
The first comprehensive examination of state parks, *The State Parks: Their Meaning in American Life* (1962), by Freeman Tilden, is a comparative study that portrays the importance of state parks in preserving American customs, encouraging natural curiosity, and providing places for recreational opportunity. Tilden’s national scope facilitates a general understanding of state park composition, park director attitudes, and park purpose.  

More recently and also important is Ney C. Landrum’s *The State Park Movement in America: A Critical Review* (2004). Landrum tracks the movement’s evolution, causes, and central ideas, and assesses its successes and failures. His focus is on the movement as a major social and environmental phenomenon rather than attempting to write a definitive history of individual state parks. Most important for this thesis is Landrum’s detailed discussion of how state park systems were conceived, beginning with the First National Conference on Parks in 1921 and ending with a look at parks today and their future.  

A third work, Thomas R. Cox’s *The Park Builders: A History of State Parks in the Pacific Northwest* (1988) traces the development of state park systems in Idaho, Oregon, and Washington. Starting in the Progressive era, he follows prominent leaders who helped develop the states’ park systems through the 1980s. He contends that these leaders not only played a key role in the region’s conservation movement and park development; they assisted in other activities such as the preservation of roadside environments and unique wildlife systems previously in danger of destruction. Cox’s use of a case study structure and examination of the conservation movement through important individual figures provides a good example for analyzing state park system formation.

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13 Tilden.
14 Landrum.
The works of Landrum and Tilden introduce sentiments that led to the establishment and development of state parks, while not focusing on any park in particular. On the other hand, Cox’s use of three states seems to be an appropriate scope for his focus on regional parks systems’ formation and development.

The few other studies on state parks tend to focus on only one state’s system, such as Jay Price’s *Gateways to the Southwest: The Story of Arizona State Parks* (2004), Roy Willard Meyer’s publication, *Everyone’s Country Estate: A History of Minnesota’s State Parks* (1991), and *Where People and Nature Meet: A History of the West Virginia State Parks* (1988) sponsored by the West Virginia State Park History Committee. Most of these works explore the origins of specific state park systems and how they were impacted by changing social values. For example, Price’s work examines how the recreation and tourism boom in the 1950s and 1960s resulted in the creation of Arizona state parks, how the environmental movement influenced their establishment during the 1970s and 1980s, and how the parks were affected by the state’s financial challenges in the 1990s. Most of the authors also illustrate how their studies are applicable to other park systems and offer new insights into environmental history. This thesis echoes some of their findings but in a comparative manner by analyzing three states’ systems to categorize each based on land alteration, administration, maintenance, visitation, and programming.

According to Landrum, recreation professionals have been struggling to create a method for park classification for many years. In his study, Landrum identifies different classes of recreation, which suggest different kinds of parks. However, to propose a separate park design

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17 Price.
for each form of recreation would have been tedious and impractical. He then faced the question of how to group the classes of recreation.

I [Landrum] found, to my own way of thinking, there really were only two fundamental groupings: one that relied on artificial, man-made facilities, and a second that required one or more elements of the resource base for its support. To describe these two groups, I borrowed Clawson’s terminology and called the first *user-oriented* and the second *resource-based*.  

This study is an extension of Landrum’s idea; it places parks in a land development continuum, which ultimately reflects state and public attitudes toward the use of natural resources and wilderness areas.

*The Study*

The present study examines how the creation and organization of Maumee Bay State Park in Ohio, Indiana Dunes State Park, and William C. Sterling State Park in Michigan reflect different state and public sentiments toward use of natural resources and areas. These three parks were chosen because of their comparable yet diverse environments, potential as recreational areas, and location. Each park’s proximity to a Great Lake has resulted in three distinct natural settings initially shaped by centuries of significant climate changes. The parks are also situated near expanding urban and industrial centers (Chicago, Detroit, and Toledo), that have impacted each park environmentally and recreationally. Lastly and most importantly, the parks were altered to some degree by humanity.

With this in mind and following extensive historical research in Michigan, Indiana, and Ohio, this study argues that each state government’s priorities, as transmitted through their representative Departments of Natural Resources (DNRs), shaped the histories of specific state

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18 Landrum, xiii, 19-20.
parks. State DNRs hold notions of what a state park should be, how it should be administered, and what its obligations are to the public. These notions differ somewhat from state to state and are apparent in levels of park development such as landscape alteration, facility construction, and a range of recreational opportunities. To measure differences prevalent in these state parks, this study uses the following developmental continuum: “slightly developed”—as being significantly undeveloped and natural with a few campsites; “moderately altered”—where the area has been developed to provide campgrounds and amenities; and “significant change”—parks with a lodge, golf course, and other special facilities. This scale not only gauges state views of nature but land use priorities conveyed by different DNR mission statements and goals.¹⁹

The chapters in this thesis are structured as case studies of each state’s park system and representative park. Each chapter places its park on the above-mentioned continuum in two sections: Part I of each chapter examines the creation of state regulating agencies and their goals, while Part II explores three periods of park development—the “early,” “middle,” and “late years.” Within these timeframes, state and public attitudes toward the use of natural resources and wilderness areas are represented through alteration of parkland, park administration and maintenance, visitation, and programming. As a comparative study, subsequent chapters consider noteworthy differences and similarities existing among the three parks. Lastly, the Conclusion provides an overall assessment and reflects on the significance of the study’s findings.

Evidence to support this thesis has been drawn largely from state documents as well as interviews with two park managers, a naturalist, and a senior ranger. Information gathered from these four park administrators conveys how the states value their unique natural areas. Additionally, because these individuals are citizens who utilize the parks and observe their own

¹⁹ Ibid., 19-20.
environmental attitudes, they reflect local sentiments. Further evidence that supports
information gained from the interviews has been found at the Indiana Historical Society, Ohio
Historical Society, and Michigan State Archives in state government and DNR documents. In
addition, the author visited each of the three state parks to participate in numerous recreational
activities and programs to witness how the park is administered, used, and maintained. Other
sources that have supplemented park histories consist of newspaper clippings, managerial files,
and development plans archived at each park. This thesis also makes use of archived materials
from private organizations, such as the Indiana Save the Dunes Council and the Monroe County
Historical Commission.

Whether a state park is rimmed by an industrial center and port city or seemingly
peaceful residential area, its fate may lie within the attitudes and actions of the surrounding
community. Thus, it is the responsibility of the American government and public to ensure that
natural resources and wilderness areas are conserved for future generations. After considering
the latter and before beginning the first chapter, the reader should keep in mind the words of
environmentalist Aldo Leopold: “Is it not a bit beside the point for us to be so solicitous about
preserving [American] institutions without giving so much as a thought to preserving the
environment which produced them and which may now be one of our effective means of keeping
them alive?”

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20 Nash, 188.
CHAPTER I

W.C. STERLING STATE PARK, MICHIGAN: FROM PRIMITIVE ROOTS TO A MODERN EXISTENCE

Take the limitless horizon of Lake Erie. Let the long, low tongue of Stony Point glide into it on the left. Add a mile and a quarter of white beach and a sandy bottom that drops so gradually (less than one foot every hundred feet) even the youngest swimmers are perfectly safe. Back this up with groves of willow, cottonwood, elm, poplar, and maple—not too many, perhaps, but enough for ample shade—and a lazy lagoon stocked with large and small mouth bass, bluegills, perch, bullheads, and other pan fish. Surround such a plot of natural landscape with a background of busy, prosperous farms, steel mills, paper mills, automotive plants, a thriving city and lake port—all the trappings of the most advanced civilization—and there you have not only a picture of Michigan, but an accurate description of Sterling State Park...

Michigan Writers’ Project [1930s] ¹

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² “Monroe, Michigan,” Mapquest.com, 2006

Introduction

Today, driving down the newly-paved entrance road into Sterling State Park for the first time, park-users may be shocked as their attention is first momentarily drawn to the pluming stacks of the park’s neighboring Detroit Edison power plant, reminding them of the nearby industrial giants: Detroit, Michigan, and Toledo, Ohio. The only Michigan state park on Lake Erie, Sterling lies just north of the Ohio-Michigan border, in Monroe. Despite the visitor’s momentary lapse, first impressions of the park are generally grand. A thin tree line, acting as a fence that separates the driver from acres of prairie land, guides guests along the winding entrance road. Soon, after passing the park office and admittance booth, park users come upon the mysteriously dark lagoons, the boat launch with its historical marker which narrates the importance of the area, and numerous picnic sites, trailheads, and parking lots. On the shores of Lake Erie, the pride of the park is a well-landscaped and open campground, which captures the eyes of weary travelers as they discover that this state park, under the supervision of the Michigan Department of Natural Resources (MDNR), serves a twofold purpose: “to preserve Michigan’s natural resources and its places of historic interest, and to furnish vacationists, tourists, and pleasure-seekers with opportunities to enjoy land, water, trees, and wildlife in their natural state.” The implementation of these goals at Sterling State Park prove that Michigan’s attitudes toward its parks system reflect public sentiments dealing with the use of natural resources and protection of wilderness areas. ³

Each state holds different views of how unique natural areas should be used, resulting in different state park systems and environmental management philosophies. These systems are greatly shaped by the evolution of historic land use and perceptions of

³ Ibid.
environmental integrity. With this in mind, there are two important histories of the Sterling State Park area: the struggle between the European settlers, particularly the French, and Native Americans who first inhabited the area; and story of outdoor living and the battle between development and preservation. Both tales are important because they allude to changing attitudes and care-taking roles the MDNR and the citizenry have taken toward use of the state’s natural resources and wilderness areas.  

This thesis maintains that these notions differ markedly from state to state. How Michigan and its citizens value natural environments has been reflected in the development of the state regulating agency and Sterling’s administration, maintenance, visitation, and programming. This places Michigan’s Sterling State Park as “slightly developed” in the park development continuum discussed in the Introduction.  

Originally, Monroe was inhabited by the Wyandotte Indians, whom the French called Hurons. They had a large village nearby called “Maera” or “Walk-in-the-water,” which described the region’s early marsh environment. These Natives first recognized the importance of the area for its natural resources and navigable waterways. Here, oral histories say that the sky was routinely blackened by the abundance of ducks, the water teemed with large sturgeon, and the landscape was dotted with the lodges of muskrats and beaver. These animals encouraged trade in the region and the eventual establishment of the Northwest Fur Company depot on the River Raisin in 1775.  

The French were the first to lay claim to the area when two Jesuit priests, Carron and Jean de Brebeuf, discovered Lake Erie’s potential as a port in 1634. While exploring the locale the two men came upon a river bordered with trees wrapped with wild

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5 Ibid.
6 Ibid.
grapevines and named it the River of Raisins, the eventual site of the Battle of the Raisin in 1813. The land for miles around was level, with the only exception being areas where streams carved out the land. The soil consisted of clay, sand, silt and muck. Under the layers of soil was limestone, which settlers later used in the construction of their homes. French settlers never left the region, even though the mother country surrendered her title in 1763. Seventeen years later the city of Monroe was established. It was known locally as “Frenchtown,” making it the second oldest town in the state.

For a time after the military campaigns of 1812 and the Toledo War of 1835, Monroe grew so quickly that many residents thought it would soon overtake Detroit, which had been founded in 1701. Established first by the fur trade, Monroe became an important lake port—Michigan’s only one on Lake Erie—and the shipping industry increased commerce and economic activity. Migration along the Erie Canal facilitated the spread of popular lore about the riches found in the West, which encouraged settlement in southeast Michigan. Early popularity of the region’s natural resources made Monroe attractive for industrial development. Eventually, its port became a terminal for stage coach lines. Entrepreneurs established large numbers of taverns to accommodate the growing number of travelers coming through the area. Increasingly, visitors became

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7 The Battle of the River Raisin was within park boundaries. There is a historical marker on the site where in 1813 the bodies of American soldiers were found. They surrendered to the British and were massacred by their Indian allies, Michigan Writer’s Project, “Gateway to Michigan’s Park System”; Becker.

8 Ibid.

9 In 1835 a border dispute between Ohio and Michigan ended. Both states quarreled over the geographic position of their state lines, realizing the importance of Toledo, a port city on the southwestern edge of Lake Erie. Michigan and Ohio sent troops marching; the winner of the battle would get the city. However, the rough terrain surrounding Toledo, the Great Black Swamp, slowed Ohio’s troops and delayed the clash. Luckily, the slow down prevented a physical dispute, and a last minute decision made by Congress granted Ohio claim to Toledo, Film, The Story of the Great Black Swamp, Dir. Joseph A. Arped, Bowling Green, OH: WBGU-TV, 1982.
aware of the area’s abundance of game. This led to the establishment of numerous
hunting clubs whose members included prominent Easterners.\(^{10}\)

The Golo Club, established in the mid-1800s and named after an oddly marked
duck which disappeared from the area, was the first among these hunting clubs. According to reports, the daily bag of the members was forty ducks. Usually a Frenchmen who knew the marshes would guide members on their outings. Storms that continually battered the shores of the Lake eventually swept the clubhouse away. The Golo Club, which had enforced high standards of game conservation, disbanded and the consequences of uncontrolled shooting permitted by other hunting clubs became evident.\(^{11}\)

In the 1880s, the newly-founded Monroe Marsh Club re-instituted a series of strict rules that were comparable to contemporary conservation laws. However, while the club was doing its best to enforce controlled hunting on its 2,300 acres, many of the local citizens grew unhappy with the organization’s hunting policies. The issue became a chief topic at the time in Monroe and continued to be an issue until Sterling State Park was established.\(^{12}\)

The construction of a railroad linking Buffalo with Toledo diverted much of the Lake Erie traffic from Monroe, and the town retired from booming settlement and industrialization in the early 1900s. Still, Monroe lay between the two industrial centers

\(^{10}\) After the Civil War, Monroe men who had served in the 7th Cavalry, including General George Armstrong Custer, joined the club and hunted the marshes that used to comprise the area where Sterling State Park is today, Michigan Writer’s Project, “Gateway to Michigan’s Park System”; Becker.

\(^{11}\) Becker.

\(^{12}\) The Monroe Marsh Company was opposed by the Liberal Shooting club, which was formed just for that purpose. The Company began a test suit, Sterling versus Jackson, famous in conservation legislation. The Liberal Shooting Club lost the circuit court decision but appealed the case to the State Supreme Court. Again the decision was in favor of the Marsh Company, but only by a one vote margin among the five justices. The court was first established in this case that the owner of the land, albeit submerged, should have the right to say who may hunt and shoot on his land, Ibid.
of Toledo and Detroit. Each depended on the other economically, and each impacted park use and funding drastically. Over time and with continual expansion, Monroe residents began to feel that they had lost the Lake to industry, private ownership, and pollution. By the 1970s, many Americans believed the rumor that Lake Erie was “dead”—choked from over a century of being treated as a dump. Although today, on the mend and no longer continuously lined with sandy beaches and trees or teeming with sturgeon, Lake Erie is at its best—preserved—by the state and its citizens at Sterling State Park.\textsuperscript{13}

The park truly is a show window for Michigan’s natural environment. Sterling’s 1,000-plus acres offer numerous recreational opportunities including swimming, boating, fishing, camping, and wildlife viewing. Situated in Monroe, Michigan, just twenty miles north of the Michigan-Ohio border, Sterling is the first state park that many tourists and park-goers encounter when entering the Great Lakes state. Realizing the importance of first impressions, the state legislature and MDNR in 1999 allocated nearly $17 million for the renovation of the park.\textsuperscript{14}

Before then, Sterling State Park was considered to be extremely underdeveloped. The last major renovations had taken place in the 1950s and 1960s. The campground was originally constructed in the interior of the park and had very few amenities for its less than 200 sites, which did not support many mobile-home electric hook-ups. There was a small ranger station, dilapidated restrooms and bathhouse on the beach (both in need of constant repair), all of which occupied a minimal amount of land prone to consistent flooding. Eventually, after a series of complaints, the park’s proximity to I-75—the


busiest corridor in the state, and escalating visitation numbers, the importance of the park grew. So did development. However, the ultimate goal of the MDNR was to maintain a natural environment similar to that encountered by the first inhabitants, yet regulated and user-friendly.\(^\text{15}\)

This represents the state and public’s value of natural spaces. Thus, the MDNR’s plans for land development and regulation of the park’s administration, maintenance, visitation, and programming are what place it in the position of “slightly developed” in the state park development continuum used in this thesis. But to understand the park, one must first examine the system under which it has been governed.\(^\text{16}\)

Part I: MDNR

This portion of the chapter is devoted to the bureaucratic history of the MDNR’s creation, which alludes to the state’s attitude toward regulation, development, and funding for state parks. Enactment of protective legislation along with periods of economic stagnation consequently led to an environmental awareness etched with unintended apathy. It is the state and public’s continual support of recreational and natural areas that has resulted in the duration of the region’s unique resources and wilderness areas.

Escalating concern for the protection of Michigan’s wild environments dated from statehood, although regulation of the state’s natural resources did not come until Public Act 17 in 1921, which created the state’s Department of Conservation. Earlier


\(^{16}\) Guest; Longnecker, interview.
management and responsibility for the state’s many unique natural areas and resources was divided and granted to numerous state agencies. For example, in 1837 the State Geological Survey provided reviews of the state’s natural resources, hazards, and environments; in 1843 the State Land Office regulated the sale of public lands; and in 1873 the State Board of Fish Commissioners oversaw the state’s fishing resources. Not until 1887 did the Independent Forestry Commission of Michigan, which surveyed the state’s forests, and the State Game and Fish Warden extend their duties to include all wildlife in their designated areas. This was the beginning of Michigan’s natural resource regulation after a period without supervision which had resulted in uncontrolled resource extraction.¹⁷

Park-specific agencies began to appear in 1895, when the Mackinac Island State Park Commission was established. The Michigan Forestry Commission assembled in 1899 to address the needs for further conservation throughout the state after decades of continual lumbering, dedicated to protecting the state’s forests. Eight years later, the position of the State Game, Fish, and Forestry Warden combined the duties and offices of the State Game and Fish Warden with the Michigan Forestry Commission and to pull together under one watchful eye resource regulation and the conservation of natural areas. To further address the need for harmonious and fused conservation regulation, more agencies united in 1909 (the State Land Office, State Board of Fish Commissioners, and the State Game, Fish, and Forestry Warden) to form the Public Domain Commission. That Michigan was increasingly learning the importance of its shrinking number of natural areas, enacting legislation, and creating resource-specific regulating bodies

affirmed the state’s early intentions for natural resources: conservation guided by wise-use.  

Meanwhile, Michiganders’ desire for more preserved natural areas was brought to the state’s attention, instigating further debate over wise use. In 1919, after analyzing neighboring states’ parks systems and the work of Michigan’s Upper Peninsula’s Mackinac Island State Park Commission, the state legislature approved the formation of the Michigan State Park Commission, which was to oversee the state’s many parks. Two years later, after Stephen T. Mather’s first National Conference on State Parks, this department’s title and responsibilities changed and its name modified to the Michigan Department of Conservation.  

It absorbed most of the duties the above-mentioned agencies with the exception of Mackinac Island State Park Commission, which remained independent. The Department of Conservation was administered by a Conservation Commission in cooperation with the Governor and with consent of the Senate, which appointed members for overlapping terms of office. The Conservation Commission selected the Director, who served as the executive head of the Department, as Supervisor of Wells, and was a member of the Water Resources Commission, State Soil Conservation Committee, the Aeronautics Commission, and the Air Pollution Control Commission. By combining these roles and titles, the state put an expert in charge to guarantee proper regulation. In the 1960s, as a possible result of liberal domination and the emerging environmental movement, the Department’s scope was further broadened with the incorporation of urban recreation.

18 Ibid.  
19 Ibid.  
In 1968, the Department of Conservation was renamed the Michigan Department of Natural Resources (MDNR). At the time it was headed by a seven-member Natural Resources Commission, who were appointed by the Governor and approved by the Senate. The Commission then selected a Director who was a member of the same groups as the Director of Conservation, whose office remained in place. Since 1968 a number of other advisory groups have been added to the MDNR, which include the Great Lakes Fishery Advisory Committee, the Recreation and Cultural Arts Advisory Commission, and the Wilderness and Natural Areas Advisory Board, all of which testify to the MDNR and state’s concern for natural spaces and resources in one of the most dominant periods of the environmental movement. The fact that Michiganders responded to the calls of environmental leaders and warnings conveyed by natural resources, for example “dying” Lake Erie, is significant in the state’s position of environmental protection.\(^{21}\)

Then, by an Executive Order of the Governor on March 13, 1973, the MDNR was granted full environmental protection responsibility for “land use planning and management, air pollution control, solid waste disposal, watershed protection and municipal wastewater treatment.” To better do its job, the governor later reorganized the MDNR into its present two-branch form consisting of the MDNR and Michigan Department of Environmental Protection. Each branch had a number of bureaus and

\(^{21}\) A series of environmentally destructive events encouraged the 1960s environmental movement. In 1962 the release of Rachel Carson’s *Silent Spring*, which forewarned about the dangers of the toxic chemical DDT and the use of pesticides and insecticides, created national debates about its regulated use. Just six years later, Paul Ehrlich released *The Population Bomb*, which addressed the ecological threats of expanding populations. Then, the Cuyahoga River fire drew attention to the poorly-managed and treated Great Lakes, specifically Lake Erie in 1969. The supposed “death” of Lake Erie, which was attributed to a lack of oxygen in the water from increased levels of algae blooms encouraged by more than a century of ill-use by shoreline cities and encouraged waterborne commerce, was an exaggerated truth that greeted the public eye in the late 1960s and early 1970s, William Ashworth, *The Late Great Lakes: An Environmental History* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1987), 34-35; Browne and Johnson, 136-137; and Worldwatch, “Environmental Milestones: A Worldwatch Retrospective,” *Worldwatch Institute Online*, 2005 [http://www.worldwatch.org/features/timeline/](http://www.worldwatch.org/features/timeline/) (accessed 7 February 2006).
divisions. The MDNR’s Parks and Recreation Division, for example, maintains the state’s parks. Because this sub-agency is a Division of the MDNR, typically it observes the Department’s regulations for administration, maintenance and development. This includes the MDNR mission statement.  

**MDNR Mission Statement**

This document is important because it conveys public sentiment and desires for development or preservation of the state’s natural areas. Phyllis Myers and Sharon Green, in their 1989 *State Parks in a New Era*, claim that park mission statements provide accurate descriptions of what a park is going to provide, be it recreational experiences or natural enjoyment. Myers and Green have found that most states do not specify “recreation,” and some forbid certain activities, such as hunting. Additionally, they write, “The emphasis on development and facilities in many park mission statements provides a clue, historically, to legislators’ views of state parks vis-à-vis other public lands. Development (or “improvement”) is mentioned as often as recreation.” The level of development and mention of facility creation established in the mission statement thus conveys state thoughts about natural and recreational environments.

According to the MDNR’s mission statement, it is “committed to the conservation, protection, management, use and enjoyment of the State’s natural resources for current and future generations.” Sterling State Park does not have its own statement but observes the MDNR’s as do many other Michigan state parks. Notably, it has no specific mention of facilities such as cabins, lodges, or resorts, leading one to believe that the state’s parks are geared toward a more natural, less developed or commercialized

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22 Browne and Johnson, 136-137; Ashworth, 34-35.
setting as requested by park administrators. The MDNR mission suggests strong state-wide environmental support for the conservation of nature rather than the development of park lands.  

Good stewardship and environmental values reflected in the Michigan state park system position the state at “slightly developed” in the State Park development continuum used by this thesis. The analysis of history, land development, maintenance and administration, visitation, and programming at W.C. Sterling State Park in the following section will support this placement among Great Lakes parks.

Part II: Sterling State Park

W.C. Sterling State Park, Michigan’s only state park on Lake Erie, is regularly battered by storms. A former marsh routinely reclaimed by high levels of water, it is literally a man-made island. Standing as the half-way point between the booming metropolitan centers of Detroit and Toledo, Sterling is one of the busiest state parks in Michigan, making it one of the most applicable for this study. The MDNR’s implementation of its mission statement at this park reflects larger public sentiments toward natural areas. This is supported by analysis of land development, administration and maintenance, visitation, and programming.  

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The “early years” of park development were characterized by the MDNR goals carried out through minor alterations of parkland that resulted in the creation of a popular area for recreational use. However, the changes made to the land and introduction of large numbers of visitors influenced the park’s design and brought about large changes in the natural environment, particularly the draining of the marshland.

Sterling State Park’s foundation was laid when the state acquired the initial 134 acres in 1935. Part of the land was a gift from both the city of Monroe and the Monroe

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Piers Land Company. The latter was initially owned by Commodore W.C. Sterling, the first commodore of the old Monroe Yacht Club, for whom the park is named. Originally, the first few acres of park land consisted of a long narrow strip of former marshland lying between Lake Erie and a lagoon. On a single day in the spring or fall one could still find as many as 5,000 wild ducks on the lagoon and an equal amount of swans on the lake. The park continued to be a spot favored by the muskrat, which earlier had inspired the former Monroe Yacht Club’s annual Muskrat Banquets held each Christmas season. The state’s design for the park at this time was monumental and no doubt reflected the public’s interest in the emerging environmental and state park movements.\footnote{Ibid.}

Throughout the park’s first twenty years of existence, many changes were made to the land to make it accessible for the surrounding population. Its former use, adequacy, and potential as a recreational setting geared the area for minor development. Although, before park construction could begin, debris that had washed upon the beach by Lake Erie had to be removed or buried, leaving the sand somewhat level and clean. Park staff trimmed old trees standing throughout the park and planted new ones. Transformation of the early primitive and marshy environment was necessary, as would be the creation of drainage ditches and a few lagoons to remove much of the standing water. Changes made to the land after the state acquired it represented the public’s desires for a user-friendly environment.\footnote{Ibid.}

Then construction began. Eventually, five movable bath houses were erected, each capable of housing eight people, along with four box toilet buildings. Despite these changes, one park visitor reported:

\footnote{Ibid.}
To all appearances it is as old as the oldest of Monroe County’s farms. The trees are tall and strong, the grass is green and thick, the ground is as firm as if bedrock lay but a few inches below. A wide stretch of marshes some distance west of the park is almost the only remainder of its former condition.29

While minor, the first phase of park development altered the natural setting by removing water and introducing large crowds of people.30

The MDNR was devoted to making the park accessible and useful as a recreational area in its primary developmental goals, reclaiming much of the park’s land-acreage from Lake Erie to make it compatible with recreation and use for something other than hunting. Indeed many praised the state’s early efforts at the park. One visitor stated:

The remarkably speedy transformation of Sterling State Park from an area of little use into a playground where thousands have found pleasure and health, is concrete proof of the wisdom of the land reclamation policy of the Michigan Department of conservation, and a tribute to the Work Projects Administration which performed the bulk of the work.31

By the 1940s, Sterling was one of the best-equipped parks in the state. Facilities included campfire pits, picnic tables, playgrounds, camp stores, parking spaces, and campsites for trailers and tents. In addition, the Monroe Yacht Club’s headquarters was overhauled, painted and used as the Park’s Pavilion. The willingness of the state to contribute to the creation of a recreational area in the 1930s is important evidence of the Michigan position

29 Ibid.
30 Ibid.
31 Michigan Writer’s Project, “Gateway to Michigan’s Park System.”
on wilderness conservation. This utilitarian-conservation sentiment was appropriate for the time and facilitated high visitation numbers.  

The Conservation Department was confident that the combination of natural settings and location would help Sterling become one of the best patronized state parks in Michigan. In 1936, the park’s first year of operation, the Department’s expectations were fulfilled; nearly 80,000 visitors were recorded to have attended the park, of which 514 were campers. Two years later the number of campers had more than doubled and the visitor count had reached 226,870, placing the park among the top ten state parks in Michigan’s system. One Sunday that year nearly 12,000 people were counted, with one-fourth of those being in the water. As the park’s popularity grew, visitation increased well into the 1940s. The public was taking advantage of the newly created environmental area that had been designed and set aside for them.

In addition to confronting rising visitation numbers, the Park had to face weather patterns that continually permitted the Lake to swallow its beach and the majority of its land, and an erratic economy. In 1953 high lake levels and a lack of funds kept the MDNR from opening the park. High water had toppled hundreds of trees in the park, washed out thousands of tons of sand beach, damaged roads, covered parking lots, smashed outhouses and filled wells. According to Charles M. Leeson, the Regional Supervisor of Parks for the state at the time, the park needed $45,000 to make few of

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33 Michigan Writer’s Project, “Gateway to Michigan’s Park System.”
many necessary repairs. He thus requested an addition to the annual budget, but uncertainty of Lake Erie’s plans for the coming year made the state legislature wary of the request. Leeson, in response, stated,

This part of Michigan deserves a state park equal to any in the state. The state park served 500,000 persons in 1951 and is the only public recreation area between Detroit and the Ohio line. We would like to open the park, expand it and install more modern facilities but in the face of the current high water level, there is nothing we can do.\(^{34}\)

With the addition of park facilities, the park’s limited staff would have to be expanded. Administration of new park employees and regulations along with the maintenance of additional amenities would place a larger financial burden on the state if visitation numbers did not increase or maintain. The imprints from frequent flooding and the Depression would continually hamper park development in this period. It was nearly two years before the legislature would approve funding for a renovation, which began in 1955.\(^{35}\)

From its inception, Sterling State Park had provided visitors with numerous recreational activities, including picnicking, swimming, fishing and camping. However, in addition to funding early park programming was almost nonexistent, minus a few exceptions. The first exception was local organizations that would hold meetings or special events on park perimeters, which encouraged visitation. Secondly, in 1946, Michigan’s Department of Public Instruction and the Department of Conservation joined

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in a camping and outdoor education project for elementary to senior high school students. The purpose of the project was to offer students new and direct learning experiences that would stress the importance of conservation and uncover how education in the wilderness would facilitate “better training in citizenship for democratic living to meet national and world needs.” For a while, the program was a success. While many state parks were utilized for the project, it is unknown whether Sterling was used for this purpose. Regardless, it is important to note the state’s persistence in having its youth partake in outdoor experiences. Sterling’s direct involvement with programming would not be until the 1960s when it really expanded.  

While changes in the land were seemingly minimal during this period, the removal of standing water in the region largely impacted the original wilderness that the first settlers encountered. Consequentially, the area witnessed the disappearance of formerly big quantities of animals. Development of the park was, however, successful in introducing the public to one of the state’s many unique environments. This encouraged and promoted an environmental awareness. Yet the battle for funding would endure. 

The Middle Years: 1955-1979

Public attitudes toward the park’s development further impacted its appearance in the “middle years,” which are most notable for neglect caused by a large reduction in financial support at the state level. Revitalization of park amenities fell short. However, by the end of the period it seemed as though the state and public would learn the consequences of their indifference toward the recreational area.

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Development of park lands continued until 1955, when Sterling State Park underwent a much needed facelift. Nearly a half a million cubic yards of silt were dredged from the bottom of a lagoon to create a 1,440 car parking area on the east side of the park. After the land was leveled the dredge moved to the interior lake at the southern portion of the park. There, dredging continued and fill was used to create a peninsula extending from the eastern shore and built up to meet another like it eventually constructed on the northern shore. Then, a new road into the park was to be built, and buildings formerly located near the beach on the south end of the park were to be moved to new locations on the northern peninsula. At the time, the park had 1.57 miles of Lake Erie frontage. Dredging increased park area from about 75 acres to approximately 340 acres, reducing water acreage from 479 acres to 165 acres. Projections for the proceeding eight to ten years included four more parking areas, capable of containing 6,740 cars or 26,000 people. There was also mention of constructing grounds for court games, archery, concessions and bath houses, and baseball diamonds. With all this development it is important to note that while the MDNR worked to integrate user-friendly facilities, it also attempted to preserve portions of the park, designating areas for native prairie and forest environments.

Further changes to the land occurred between the mid-1960s and -1970s. In 1966 construction of the first of three proposed, newly-created campground began. The new campground was located on the Park’s northwest side, consisted of eighty-eight units

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37 After the first phase of this primary face-lift, landscaping that would encourage the return of native environments began. In April, 1962, the park signed a contract with a landscaping firm for the purchase planting and maintaining of 184 trees for $12,875. The trees consisted of sugar maple, tulip, sycamore, and red oak, most planted at the south end of the park to provide shade for picnic areas and parking lots. Of course bringing in new trees meant ridding the park of the 147 dead, most of which were cottonwood that perished as a result of the dredging. “Spring Work Starts at Sterling Park,” *Monroe (MI) Evening News*, 3 April 1962; “Sterling State Park Land, Water Areas Are Being Changed,” *Monroe (MI) Evening News*, 1 April 1955.
complete with electrical, toilet and shower, and drinking facilities for campers. The two other units planned for the park consisted of more than 200 sites. Additionally, in 1971 the Monroe County Board of Commissioners submitted letters to the Army Corps of Engineers and Michigan Waterways Commission to support construction of a marina at the Park. By 1975, almost total support for construction of a small-boat harbor was approved. Project plans called for the construction of breakwaters, a walkway, the dredging of an entrance, and construction of a diked disposal facility for the dredging spoils as well as the installation of necessary navigational aids. The public took advantage of these renovations, and with the renewal of swimming in 1978 after a seventeen year ban, visitation was on the upswing despite an increase in implemented user-fees encouraged by statewide budget cuts. The park took on a new shape, but most importantly, maintained its natural setting and established user-friendly activities with the prioritization and implementation of MDNR goals.\(^{38}\)

While land development in the park was continual in this period, a number of temporary closings and new funding crises impacted park administration and maintenance. For example, because of renovation the park was frequently closed for development from 1956 to 1957, which caused considerable uproar among local residents and regular park visitors that relied on the recreational area for their businesses and personal enjoyment. In voicing their disagreement to the Department of Conservation, much of the opposition used access to Lake Erie as justification for keeping portions of the park open. Then, to add to the blow of closings, park plans were further curtailed

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when the Michigan Senate failed to allocate $990,000 for renovation, administration, and maintenance under Senate Bill 1437. It appropriated instead a mere $35,000. The bill also required the park to collect parking fees and made restrictions to the plans prepared by the Department for the park’s development. This instituted wide debate over whether or not to enact the bill. However, if passed, the park had the opportunity to draw its own revenue instead of depending on state allocations, increasing the chances for better administration with more employees and self-regulation, in addition to maintenance of updated facilities.  

As may be observed in many other states’ state park systems, as will be seen in Indiana, Michigan’s legislature had discovered that by charging entrance fees, budget cuts could be made in appropriations for the recreational areas, providing that visitation remained high. The legislature eventually won, and starting on January 1, 1961, yearly stickers at the price of $2 were to be sold by hunting and fishing license distributors and the fifty-four state parks the bill affected, including Sterling. In addition to annual passes, daily stickers at the cost of fifty cents were to be made available from vending machines in the parks. There were a few loopholes; the sticker admitted vehicles with any number of visitors and did not charge pedestrians, who could have easily parked at local

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39 However, the state’s House and Governor still had to approve the Bill before fees and changes were enacted. By mid-June, 1957, debate over whether or not to charge park users was caught up in a struggle between Governor G. Mennen Williams and the legislature. The administration battled over taxes, budgets, and policies, which threatened to further halt the park’s much-needed improvements. For example, a narrow strip of land near the lagoon providing parking for the beach, which two years prior was able to hold 1,200 cars, had only been able to hold a capacity of 300. These cars, in accordance with the bill, would have to display windshield stickers at $2 cost per season for park admittance. However, Governor Williams vetoed the bill after the Senate slashed his $38 million capital improvements budget. A temporary delay, this was just the beginning of the debate, Michigan Press Clipping Bureau, “State Park,” *Michigan Holland Evening Sentinel*, 20 March 1957; “Land Created At State Park Almost Useless,” *Monroe (MI) Evening News*, 20 June 1957; “$38 million proposed for Capital improvements: Senators Slash Williams’ Budget,” *Monroe (MI) Evening News*, 15 March 1956; “Sterling Park Plans Curtailed By Senate Bill: Measure Allocates $35,000; Request Was for $990,000,” *Monroe (MI) Evening News*, 27 April 1957.
businesses and walked. The money produced by the stickers was to be used to retire a bond issue, which financed a $3 million parks improvement and expansion program.  

Imposing a fee on park-users, most already paying taxes to finance the state’s recreational areas, stimulated the fear of declining visitation. These apprehensions were eventually dispelled. Sterling Manager at the time, George Lawrentz, who was in favor of the sticker program, agreed that visitation should remain unaffected, declaring that a poll taken three years prior showed that 94 percent of state park users were in favor of the admission program. Annual visitation numbers and duration of the program would testify to that truth.  

Park attendance continued to rise well into the 1960s. On June 10, 1963, a Saturday, some 3,200 people visited the park and on the following Sunday, 8,500. This placed Sterling always within the top five Michigan state parks as a money maker and for popularity. Park visitation was also impacted by a string of beach closings in the early 1960s, when the State Board of Health discovered the presence of harmful bacteria in the waters off the shores of the park. Thirteen months prior to the August 1967 decline, the park was declared unsafe for swimming and the beach closed. Park Manager Gillmore acknowledged that the incident had a negative impact on attendance but only attributed 15 to 20 percent of the trend on the event.

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41 Ibid.
43 The majority of park-users, depending on the day and weather, tended to be drawn into the park from surrounding cities, like Detroit and Toledo. While many visitors were fishermen/women and campers, a holiday like Memorial Day weekend brought in thousands of people just for the day. Most fought over parking spaces, camping lots, and the boat launch, all of which were generally crammed by 9 am, Longnecker, interview.
The first beach closing occurred on August 15, 1961 on the basis of 1957 tests. Park users were not only upset about the closing but angry that the state had allowed continual recreational use for four years following the conclusive tests about which they just learned. The park’s beach did not reopen for swimming again for seventeen years. After that, the beach continued to be periodically closed.45

With time the Park’s appearance began to degrade along with its popularity due to insufficient funding for more staff and maintenance supplies. In 1967 attendance had dropped by nearly 61 percent. Howard Gillmore, who was Park Manager at the time, blamed weather, reaching his conclusion after studying weather data and talking to park visitors and Monroe business owners. The park’s attendance that year was 221,000 compared to 580,000 from 1966. Then, later that year construction of the new campsites and introduction of special programming at Sterling began to boost visitation statistics.46

Attempts to ward off declines in visitation numbers, particularly during winter, led to the establishment of multiple events hosted at and by the park, in cooperation with the MDNR and various other organizations. For example, in February of 1964 the Park hosted Monroe’s first annual Perchtown winter Fishing Derby, drawing a crowd of 5,000 people for the weekend-long event. Howard Gillmore, Manager of the Park in the 1960s, proclaimed that four events, excluding the famous Derby, would continue to put the Monroe recreational region on the map. First, he claimed the extension of park programs,
development, and expansion of the Park would continue to meet the recreational desires of users. Secondly, Gillmore acknowledged the need for conservation education and helped lay out the plans for a summer program to be carried out annually. In cooperation with the Lake Erie Cleanup Committee, this summer program was designed to “be slanted toward conservation of water.” Third, he said that continual development would draw crowds in for the dedication of new park buildings, to be named after contributors and contributing bodies. Finally, a survey of erosion control for the north channel was to be taken to assist in dredging and land loss prevention. Ongoing renovation, Boy Scout and additional organizational events, fishing and sledding derbies, and other programs continued to be an important factor in Sterling’s drive to become one of the top state parks in Michigan. Yet the park maintained a somewhat volatile existence throughout the 1970s.  

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Drastic alteration followed by a period of economic stagnation resulted in neglect of the park. The idea of imposing a park fee enabled additional revenue for the park, which in turn removed some of the state’s financial obligations. Loss of funding contributed to the degradation of the park. Without the drastic alterations within park administration in the “middle years,” a period of change would not have come about.

The Later Years: 1980-2005

Park revival and renovation are characteristics of the “later years,” which resulted in a much needed turnaround for the park. As the state and public’s environmental values increased, they continued to be defined by land development, administration and

47 Ibid.
maintenance, visitation, and programming, which grew. Thus, this section illustrates how the MDNR’s goals were ultimately represented to the state and public’s best abilities.

Because of Sterling State Park’s growing popularity, despite two attempted revivals between 1970 to 1990, the park’s dilapidated state was mainly attributed to insufficient funding. Shortly thereafter, Michiganders—politicians and civilians alike—agreed to the reconstruction of the entire park in late 1999. Two state figures important to the funding approval were Representative Randy Richardville (Monroe) and Senator Beverly Hammerstrom (Temperence). In October, 2001, the two legislators urged the state Natural Resources Commission to approve $15 million for the project at Sterling. Luckily, the state legislature had previously approved the sale of $100 million in bonds to be used for improvements of state parks. The remaining $5 million was to come from the Clean Michigan Initiative, a bond proposal approved by voters to fund environmental projects in 1998. Representative Richardville urged the panel, stating, “Sterling State Park would become the premier park destination in Michigan and a tremendous asset to the people of Monroe.” The substantial improvements ultimately benefited more people than expected, improving the state’s southeastern region’s tourist economy.48

48 In 1988 legislative events began to favor the MDNR and Sterling park-users when a long-awaited dredging of Sandy Creek and the installation of a new boat-launch access were included among an estimated $1.4 million improvement project. It was the first dredging of the harbor in thirty years, and the channel became one of the busiest on Lake Erie. The MDNR had negotiated an agreement with the Army Corps of Engineers to dispose of the dredgings in the Corps’ large containment area already located at the north end of the park. The dredging was the second step in a three-phase upgrading project for the park. Phase 1 was the paving of a parking lot which accommodated more than eighty cars at the launch area and addition of another skid pier in the prior year. Phase 3 was the construction of more modern restroom facilities at the boat launch, which replaced the dated outhouses, Dean Cousino, “Dredging Among Projects Slated at State Park,” Monroe (MI) Evening News, 22 January 1987; Dean Cousino, “Dredging at state park nears,” Monroe (MI) Evening News, 29 February 1988; “State Park Projects Could Begin by March,” Monroe (MI) Evening News, 26 November 1987; “Dredging of Sandy Creek Channel Gets Started,” Monroe (MI) Evening News, 26 March 1988; “State Park Dredging Completed,” Monroe (MI) Evening News, 19 April 1988; “Lawmakers Seek Dollars for Sterling,” Monroe (MI) Evening News, 12 October 2001.
Near the end of 2001 the park closed for construction for two years, reopening in 2003. Improvements included the development of a new 250-site beachside campground, which moved from the interior of the park to the lakeshore. Additionally, twelve of the fourteen park buildings were torn down and replaced with five, integrating the workshop and park office. Hiking trails, new roads, a fishing pier, day-use parking and a new beach were also among the changes. This meant that the 1 million visitors plus who frequented the park annually would eventually have one of the state’s best and newest recreational areas available. Appropriately, on July 4, 2003, in honor of the national holiday and the park’s reopening, visitors watched a free firework show, which has since become an annual event, celebrating and symbolizing American life.  

![Figure 3. Recent aerial photo of Sterling State Park.](image)

Encouraging this swift turnaround in the 1980s, Sterling, like many other parks throughout the state, had been hit hard by state budget reductions and cuts in staffing. This resulted in its degradation and an increasing amount of complaints from local park users and out-of-state tourists. In August 1980, two park visitors sent the following letter

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to the MDNR Director in an attempt draw the attention of the park and state administrations for their neglect:

The people responsible for selecting and developing a state park in a swamp should be charged with malfeasance in office. This park, at best, is a haven for mosquitoes and other insects. The staff assigned there is grossly negligent. The rest rooms gave no evidence of anything more than a perfunctory cleaning. There were dead bugs, live spider nests and webs all over the walls, ceilings, and vanities. The shower heads in two shower stalls were missing. In view of the State of Michigan’s financial problems, we’d like to suggest that you close this park and utilize the staff elsewhere.

Again I reiterate we think the Michigan State Parks as a whole, are far superior to any other but SSP should be closed to save further loss of good money after bad.  

Carl Doxtator, Sterling’s Park Manager at the time, blamed the recession. He explained that the Park’s workers had been cut back six hours every two weeks and that “grass is growing like mad, and every one of our mowers is broken.” Breaks in the Park’s sewer and water lines also needed attention, and that while there were continual efforts to remove the dead fish from the beaches, new batches arrived daily. This was before an additional $50 million was cut from the Department’s budget.

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51 Mr. and Mrs. Harry H. Geokon, Jr, to Director Tonner, correspondence, 20 August 1981, Library of Michigan, State Archives, Lansing, Michigan: W.C. Sterling State Park files.

52 Geokon correspondence, August 20, 1981. Another complaint published in the Monroe Evening News editorial reads: “I moved to Monroe recently. Someone said they had a nice state park east of town. Enclosed is a ticket to said park. The beach on Lake Erie is covered with dead fish! The road to the lake is so rough it is almost impassable. It is a waste of $2 to see that mess!” Most of the dead fish were vestiges of “winter kill” in which the fish are oxygen-starved, and “natural die-off” from Lake Erie, “Sterling no Bargain,” Monroe (MI) Evening News, 28 May 1982.
Then in the 1990s Michigan’s state parks were hit with another budget cut which drastically impacted park staff. Under a new management plan announced by Russell Harding, Director of the Parks Division, twenty-nine top-level jobs were eliminated and administrative duties would be transferred to the thirty-six “core” state parks. The changes would save nearly $500,000 because 80 percent of the cost for running a park is salaries. In addition to job layoffs, the Division decided to close a large number of parks for “unproductive” portions of the year, like winter, and Sterling was not an exception. Its manager, Steve Harmon, decided to protest the periodic closings and won by proving that the park was still fiscally productive during the winter months.\footnote{Dean Cousino, “Manager Makes Plea for Park: Harmon Tries to Halt Closing of Sterling,” \textit{Monroe (MI) Evening News}, 5 November 1991; Emilia Askari, “State Parks Hit Crossroads in Fiscal Crunch: Panel Seeks Cures for the Ailing System,” \textit{Detroit (MI) Free Press}, 4 November 1991; Charles Slat, “Harmon’s Business Good Time for a Million,” \textit{Monroe (MI) Evening News}, 13 May 1991.}

These events began to alarm Michiganders who had frequented the park to an annual visitation number of 1 million for the first time since the 1930s, and had begun to picture their favorite state parks being franchised or commercially developed. Luckily for Monroe residents and park users, Sterling never met this fate and in the end got an almost $20 million face-lift.\footnote{Ibid.}

Park programming continued to play an important role in promoting visitation. By the summer of 1995 the park had enlisted a retired couple and college senior to provide campground activities for visitors. The married team, Larry and Shirley Netherton, acted as “Campground Hosts” for nearly three months. The program was designed and endorsed by the MDNR to enrich the camping experience in Michigan state parks. The college senior, Jamie Weasel, became the park’s first “Adventure Ranger,” and worked in conjunction with the Nethertons. The three organized games, scavenger hunts and
parades for children and hosted dances for those of all ages. These programs became increasingly popular with families camping at the park. The Nethertons and Weasel became a liaison between the park staff and visitors, providing information and aid to reduce the number of park users who frequented the park office. The program workers also provided help with minimal maintenance and thus allowed park rangers to focus on their main duties.\textsuperscript{55}

By 1998 the Park boasted of its growing programs and recreational improvements. Nature trails were highlighted, on which lucky visitors occasionally saw swans, nesting herons, egrets and eagles. Weekly “Adventure Programs” provided information about the trees and other natural items found within the park’s boundaries. One popular activity called “Water Wonders” focused on Lake Erie. Free fishing was provided on select days, with the park supplying poles and bait. The increase and variety of programs the park offered encouraged visitation. By December, 1999, Sterling was declared the fourth busiest among Michigan’s state parks, moving up from sixth the year before.\textsuperscript{56}

Michigan’s agenda for use of its natural resources and areas, as outlined by the MDNR, entail the provisions for conserved wilderness. These areas also facilitate recreational experiences. The disappearance of values during almost every period of development may be due to the state’s economic instability. Regardless, Sterling


represents the state and public’s sentiments toward the environment, as characterized by this final period of development.

Conclusion

In high school Jim Longnecker dreamt of becoming a conservation officer. It was then that he began working summers at Sterling State Park. He eventually did an internship at the park, which enabled him to get his “foot in the door,” a good thing for a growing conservationist who liked working in the state park. Longnecker was employed by the MDNR at a time when conservation officer jobs were hard to get, so his placement as a park ranger at Sterling after five years of arduous but personally-valued summer work paid off. Now the Park’s Senior Ranger, Longnecker has been stationed at Sterling for nearly eleven years, making his stay a total of sixteen. Longnecker is one of many Michigan state park officers who work to not only make state parks safe, but maintain their environmental integrity. He also represents the combined efforts of the state and its citizens. As outlined by the state regulating body and park administrators, his responsibilities are to “protect the people, help them in any way—make sure they have an enjoyable time at the park…enforce the park rules, [and] maintain security.”

As Longnecker drives the park’s big, white Ford-150 to do one of many daily rounds, he discusses the park’s layout and some brief history, especially how it has been transformed over the years. He talks about exciting events, such as the Muskrat Dinners that the historic Monroe Yacht Club hosted in the clubhouse once located within the park’s boundaries. He describes the place where an old park workshop once stood, which burned down in the 1940s. He also points out a sign depicting the sale of land for

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suburban development just off the main road. The state has been negotiating with the owners of the land in an attempt to add it to the park’s acreage. The struggle has resulted in this scare tactic. If the state does not buy the land, it will be sold and developed. Ultimately, Michigan’s renowned park could become threatened by industrial development.58

With this in mind, Sterling State Park, under the supervision of the state’s DNR, is to serve a twofold purpose: “to preserve Michigan’s natural resources and its places of historic interest, and to furnish vacationists, tourists, and pleasure-seekers with opportunities to enjoy land, water, trees, and wildlife in their natural state.” Examining the implementation of this goal at Sterling State Park over three periods of development has proven that the attitudes the state government hold toward its parks system reflect larger public sentiments dealing with the use of natural resources and protection of wilderness areas. Except for the times of economic downfall, the state of Michigan has been willing to support the development and preservation of state recreational areas. Land alteration at Sterling is relative to the park’s location in the southeastern corner of Michigan, a commercial hub between two large cities and directly accessible to three states, and visitors. These park users are different from those that frequent the less populous and more primitive areas of the state’s Upper Peninsula. The MDNR has done a

58 Longnecker discussed his first day as a park ranger. His first day as a seasonal employee had differed drastically from his first day as a ranger. His first days of seasonal work consisted of garbage and litter pick-up on the beach, and other areas of the park, that had accumulated throughout the winter. As a full-time officer, for his first day he performed many jobs an officer would do, having more authority and responsibility, minus a few credentials that deputy rangers earned after going through the academy enabling many DNR officers the right to ticket. More specifically, his responsibilities were and still are to “protect the people, help them in any way—make sure they have an enjoyable time at the park…enforce the park rules, maintain security,” Longnecker, interview, January 2006.
sufficient job of providing its citizens with slightly developed areas for wilderness experiences. 59

The history of the Monroe area is just as important as the existence and appearance of Sterling State Park today. Early environmental values established by the first owners and members of the hunting clubs shaped the conservation laws that the state soon employed. The desire for preserved tracts of land led to the creation of Sterling, and the eventual administration, caretaking, and maintenance by park staff like the Nethertons and Longnecker carried out. Subsequently, these people represent the ideals and values of the state (MDNR) in their day-to-day work, ultimately showcasing the state’s environmental integrity. 60

What does Sterling say about the MDNR’s story? Michigan’s stated goals for preservation as outlined by its regulating body entail the provisions for maintained environmental areas that facilitate recreational opportunities in a natural setting. The abdication of these values during almost every period of development suggests that Michigan’s values of nature wavered because of economic instability attached to the cyclic market of the automotive industry. Unfortunately, in times of tight budgets it is the natural world that suffers, as environmental concerns are pushed to the side. Michigan’s “show window” park was no exception. 61

In the “early years” of park development, MDNR goals were carried out through minor alterations that were successful in creating a popular area for recreational

59 Ibid.
60 Ibid.
activities. However, this alteration and the introduction of large numbers of people influenced the park design and brought about large changes in the natural environment, particularly the draining of the marshland. Public sentiments toward the park’s construction further impacted its appearance in the “middle years,” which are most notable for neglect caused by budget cuts. Revitalization of park amenities fell short and by the end of the 1980s it seemed as though the state and public were learning the consequences of their apathy toward the resource. The drastic alterations within park administration in the middle years facilitated a period of change. Final revival and renovation are symbolic of the “later years,” which resulted in a drastic turnaround for the park. As the state and public’s environmental values as defined by land development, administration and maintenance, visitation, and programming grew, the MDNR’s goals were represented to the state and public’s best abilities.\textsuperscript{62}

As will be seen in the following chapter, efforts to preserve natural environments extend beyond park perimeters. The threat of industrial development to many natural areas has instigated social movements on large and small scales, with the Indiana Dunes bordering the southern shores of Lake Michigan being an example. While Sterling State Park reflects “slight development,” Indiana Dunes State Park fits the mold of “moderate alteration” on this study’s State Park development continuum.

\textsuperscript{62} Longnecker, interview, January 2006.
CHAPTER II

INDIANA DUNES STATE PARK: THE HAPPY MEDIUM?

The state park movement finally took shape, though, was never as cohesive as it might have seemed. As a matter of fact, it was eventually manifested as a movement with fifty different fronts—or at least that many variations—one for each state.

Ney C. Landrum

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Introduction

In 1821, state surveyor John Tipton reported on the boundary line between Indiana and Illinois, drawing the conclusion that the lakeshore’s marshes and dunes “can never admit of settlement nor never will be of much service to our stat [sic].” Today, at the very site that Tipton once claimed uninhabitable, one can see the steel mills of two industrial giants: Gary, Indiana, and Chicago, Illinois. While Tipton could not have expected the emergence of industry in the area, he would have been even less likely to anticipate that the wild, swampy and sand-covered lakeshore would gain an unsuspected value—not for business, but as a recreational resource.³

The Indiana government and citizens’ desire for a naturally-preserved environment amidst the booming industry of the area reflect environmental sentiments linked to Indiana’s views on wilderness preservation. The state’s establishment of a regulating body that oversees maintenance and administration, land development, and park programming which encourages visitation, all discussed in the last half of this chapter, document that this state park is an example of “moderate development” on the State Park development continuum.⁴

As in Michigan, there are two important histories to consider when examining the evolution of Indiana’s environmental values: the tale of settlement and accommodation to a marsh, dune, and lakeshore environment; and the struggle between conservation and commercial development.⁵

³ *Indiana Dunes State Park: A History and Description*, The Department of Conservation, State of Indiana (Department of Conservation, IN: 1930); George S. Cottman, “The Indiana Dunes State Park” (Department of Conservation, IN: [1930]), 7-8.
⁴ Ibid.
⁵ Landrum, 19-20.
Before Tipton had been commissioned to explore and report on the area bordering the southern tip of Lake Michigan in 1821, Indians were the dunes’ first users. Choosing to live in the forests just south of the lakeshore, various Native groups subsisted on fish, corn, beans and squash, and other woodland resources. Comprised mainly of the Miami and Potawatomi by the late 1600s, these Natives came into contact with French explorers and traders who were just discovering the region. Promoting the fur trade, the French created an immediate impact on and influenced change in Aboriginal lifestyles by encouraging over-hunting. The French traders also affected the Native cultural and sociological traditions by intermarrying. After the French fur trade’s period of domination and the United States’ acquisition of the land, Natives were removed in the mid-1800s.6

The earliest non-Indian settlers in the region were of mixed origin and did not drastically alter its natural wonders. In 1821, French-Canadian fur trader Joseph Bailly and his mixed-blood Indian wife, Marie, settled on the Little Calumet River, just south of the dunes. They constructed a trading post on their land which over time became the meeting ground for a number of traveling priests, traders, and Natives. With increasing numbers of visitors, Bailly began plotting a town near his home, hoping that westward migration would play to his favor. He was among the few that eventually settled in the immediate dunes region, as the government land office began to sell plots in nearby Lake

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and Porter Counties. By 1838, after Michigan City and Chicago had been established and gained large amounts of federal aid, Bailly’s “City West” was a ghost town.  

Prior to Bailly’s death, cultural diversity was enhanced when a portion of his land was sold to a Swedish immigrant, Anders Chellberg. Here, he built a home and farm for his family among forty acres of cleared sugar maple grove. Chellberg’s farm became the cultural center for a largely Protestant and Swedish farming community. “Barn raisings, quilting bees, maple sugaring, communal plowing and threshing were the norm.” By 1850 Porter and Lake Counties had a combined population of 9,000, most of whom were Swedes. With this, as in Monroe, Michigan, came innkeepers and various cottages, the railroads, and the industrial boom triggered by the Civil War. In the mid- to late-1800s, the growing city of Chicago provided an important market for the produce of northern Indiana farmers.

Chicagoans, growing anxious to escape their industrial landscape, also found refuge in the remoteness of the dune region. In 1873 a group of wealthy, prominent individuals founded the Tolleston Club near the dunes, purchasing acres of dune marshland to use as a hunting preserve. As in Monroe, inhabitants of the area hunted and trapped nearly 10,000 muskrats a year among other wildlife. However, the Club met opposition from the locals, who were refused hunting privileges on the land they had historically depended on for subsistence. The debate between club members and area inhabitants continued for many years.

In 1908, the Chicago, South Shore, and South Bend Railroad facilitated visitation and use of the area by hundreds of thousands of Chicagoans. Eighteen years later, the

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7 Sullivan, 24; Schaeffer and Franklin, 7-8.
9 Sullivan, 24-25.
completion of the Dunes Highway (today, U.S. Highway 12) also helped to open the region to regular access. Dr. Henry Chandler Cowles was one of the most notable people who took advantage of the area’s accessibility and proximity to Chicago. Bringing generations of students on field trips to study the dunes, Cowles became aware of natural communities, and from his studies came the intellectual structure for the scientific field of ecology. He also urged the preservation of the unique biological environments that existed among the dunes. It was the beginning of what would be an ongoing debate.10

In addition to bringing tourists and scholars to the area, the dunes attracted the threatening forces of industry. Sand miners began extracting nearly 5,000 railroad car loads of sand from the area every twenty-four hours by 1898. The leveling of the dunes then encouraged the building of factories. With the completion of the railroad in the early 1900s came the U.S. Steel mill in Gary. A city that seemed to boom overnight as a result of Chicago’s growth, Gary laid claim to several dunes, leveling and developing large areas for steel mills. Then came three more companies: Inland Steel, which opened its Indiana Harbor Plant in East Chicago; later Midwest Steel, constructed on a lakefront location inside the immediate dune region; and Bethlehem Steel, the mill most threatening to the dunes’ last, richly diverse environments.11

Despite Cowles’ effort, protests by local citizens, and the work of many conservation organizations boasting the preservation of the dunes, industry continued to creep within their confines. By the early 1920s, the dunes region was no longer a remote

10 Sullivan, 25.
“island of wilderness,” and a public outcry showed the desire for protecting the area’s last pristine dune environment. Conservationists’ best hope was the state government.\(^\text{12}\)

**Part I: IDNR**

The history of Indiana’s DNR is important testament to the state and public’s attitude toward the use of natural resources and wildlife areas, and is the focus of this portion of the chapter. Important figures promoting the regulation of unique wilderness emerged and clashed with industrial leaders. Indiana’s economy also witnessed periods of stagnation, which impacted the state and public’s response to the use of natural environments. Ultimately, both groups’ desires for conservation resulted in the establishment of a state regulating body, which reflected the significance of wildlife and represented popular but wavering sentiments toward its use.

While the origin of the state park idea in Indiana is uncertain, the creation of the system is not difficult to trace. Successful state parks had been developed in New York, Wisconsin, and Minnesota before the first state parks in Indiana (McCormick’s Creek and Turkey Run State Park) had been created and dedicated in 1916. The development of state parks in other states led to similar preserved tracts of land in the Hoosier heartland. In the forefront of Indiana’s conservation debate was Colonel Richard Lieber, who articulated the state and public’s ideals for natural areas.\(^\text{13}\)

On January 16, 1917, during the biennial session of the Indiana state legislature and just days before Governor James P. Goodrich was inaugurated, Lieber had Charles Sullivan, 25-26.  

Mendenhall formally announced to the Indiana House of Representatives the plan of the two men to establish a state conservation commission (House Bill 106). That same day, Aaron Wolfson introduced the bill to the state Senate (Senate Bill 86). However, the proposal was buried for the remainder of the Senate’s session. Fairing much better in the House, the bill was referred to a committee, studied, amended slightly, and passed on February 15, 1917, by a vote of 62-34. Press coverage of the proposed law was terse, with the most powerful papers taking sides. For example, the Indianapolis Star supported the bill while the Times was blatantly opposed. The political climate mixed with economics and natural resource protection had generated an intriguing climate. The plan for a state conservation commission became the focus of many debates until the legislature finally passed the bill.¹⁴

House Bill 106 included the creation of a conservation commission consisting of four members to be appointed by the governor, similar to Michigan’s system, for a four year term. The commission would then appoint a director to serve as the department’s executive head. That person, responsible for employee management, “would supervise the work of the divisions of the department and was charged with the enforcement of penal provisions of the set as well as the rules and regulations of the commission.” The bill proposed that the Department of Conservation consisted of five divisions: Geology; Entomology; Forestry, Parks and Waters; Fish and Game; and Animal Protection. Indiana’s conservation law, formally enacted in 1919, was unique among conservation legislation at the time, most notably for its classification of scenery as a natural resource.¹⁵

¹⁴ Frederick, 142-144.
¹⁵ Frederick, 142-145, 349-350.
In 1921 Lieber had aligned himself with park-minded conservationists like Stephen T. Mather, whom he helped organize the first National Conference on State Parks held that year. According to biographer Robert Allen Frederick, “Richard Lieber made a large contribution to the state park movement in America because his abilities encompassed both sides of the conservation coin. He was, at once, theorist and practitioner—a unique combination.” Noting that Indiana was “a miniature edition of the entire country,” Lieber’s call for preservation was unwavering. By May of 1921 the Indiana Classified Forest Act had set in motion a program, supported by volunteers, to protect and conserve thousands of acres of private Hoosier forestland, and the state’s only financially self-supporting preserve, Muscatatuck State Park, opened.  

The creation of the Indiana Department of Conservation was testament to the state’s willingness to preserve what were deemed important natural areas. From 1920 to 1926, the newly-created park system witnessed tremendous growth. For example, in 1920, total park acreage was 673 acres; by 1926 it had reached 3,475 acres. Moreover there was a rise in park attendance, drawing an annual crowd of 205,421 in 1926 compared to a mere 45,297 just one year prior. In fact, in 1924 the Republican and Democratic state platforms commended the Department of Conservation’s work and promised to uphold its conservation efforts. This was also the year that the first tract of land was bought for what would become Indiana Dunes State Park.  

In 1933 Democrat Paul McNutt became governor. Among his many changes in administration, the governor placed the Department of Conservation under the 

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16 Frederick, 142-145, 342-343; Indiana Department of Natural Resources, “DNR Historical Timeline.”
17 Quoted from Lieber’s diary, June 5, 1924 and May 22, 1924 in Frederick, 270, 272-273; Department of Natural Resources, “DNR Historical Timeline.”
jurisdiction of the Department of Public Works and named Lieber head of the
Department’s Division of State Parks and Lands and Waters.18

One of the most notable attributes of Indiana’s park system was its philosophy,
declaring that the visitor—who uses the park to derive pleasure—should contribute to
park operation and development by paying entrance fees. This would make the state
parks more independent, free from the direct rule of the state legislature and from
becoming a financial burden. As a result, park visitors and Hoosiers developed “a strong
sense of ownership in them [state parks]—ownership in a going concern,” as Lieber
reported at the National Conference on State Parks in 1930. Because of the park entrance
fee, by 1942 the average of self-support for all parks in Indiana was 105 percent. Also,
since a number of park visitors, particularly Indiana Dunes State Park users, were from
neighboring states like Michigan and Illinois, Indiana citizens alone did not have to carry
the financial burden of park up-keep.19

In 1965 the Indiana Natural Resources Act created the Indiana Department of
Natural Resources (IDNR). Under its administrative umbrella were the Department of
Conservation, Flood Control and Water Resources Commission, State Soil and Water
Conservation Committee, and Outdoor Recreation Council. Two years later the state
passed the Nature Preserves Act, establishing the Division of Nature Preserves under the
Department, with the duties of “acquisition, dedication, management and protection of
significant natural areas throughout the state.” These are the goals the IDNR attempted to
carryout and are further outlined in its mission statement.20

18 Department of Natural Resources, “DNR Historical Timeline.”
19 Frederick, 365-366.
20 Department of Natural Resources, “DNR Historical Timeline.”
IDNR Mission Statement

The IDNR mission reads, “To protect, enhance, preserve, and wisely use natural, cultural, and recreational resources for the benefit of Indiana’s citizens through professional leadership, management, and education.” While the goal incorporates the preservation-based desires of Indiana’s citizens, it also features “wise use” in declaring the importance of utilizing the state’s “natural, cultural, and recreational resources for the benefit of Indiana’s citizens.” In their series on state parks, mentioned in the previous chapter, Phyllis Myers and Sharon Green state that “Improved resource stewardship requires attention to activities both inside and outside park units,” implying compromise between conservation and commercial efforts. Most apparent in Indiana’s system is the compromise that it made with its leading industrial giants, public, and legislators. 21

Unlike Michigan, Indiana’s parks abide by the IDNR and more exclusive Division of State Parks and Reservoir’s mission statement “to manage and interpret our unique natural, wildlife, and cultural resources; to provide for compatible recreational opportunities; and to sustain the integrity of these resources for future generations.” The goal of the Division is the interpretation and presentation of native Indiana landscapes, providing experiences and surroundings similar to those prior to settlement, including mature forests, wetlands, and prairies, similar to Michigan. The difference here is the notation of “recreational opportunities.” According to Green and Myers, “recreation” can be defined in many ways and is often interpreted differently among the state park

systems. This statement is distinctly different from the IDNR’s because of its omission of wise use concepts and insertion of “recreational opportunities.”

The state park’s goals, “To manage, interpret, and increase appreciation for the property’s unique natural and cultural resources for present and future generations,” implies a preservationist sentiment uniquely different from the state’s mission. The park’s mission seems to unite the concepts underlying the state’s with an emphasis on the same values as the IDNR’s. Ultimately, combinations of the state and public’s goals have been carried out in Indiana Dunes State Park’s development through visitation, administration and maintenance, and programming. Each reflect the state and public’s attitude toward the use of natural resources and wilderness areas. Through moderate alteration of the natural environment and implementation of protective legislation, the dunes region was a space where industry and conservation clashed, social movements formed, and a state’s value of wilderness was expressed.

Part II: Indiana Dunes State Park

According to dune conservation advocate Sylvia Troy, “Efforts to save the dunes are as old as the earliest attempts to destroy them; and interestingly, even the first steps to ensure preservation were the result of citizen initiative and grass roots action.” Early efforts to preserve the dunes of Indiana that lined the southern shore of Lake Michigan appeared to counter the industrial development that threatened the area at the beginning of the twentieth century. Organizations like Friends of the Native Landscape and the

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22 “Division of State Parks and Reservoirs,” Indiana Department of Natural Resources, 2006 www.in.gov/dnr/parklake/properties/stateparks.html (accessed 4 February 2006); Myers and Green, xi.
23 Todd Webb (Park Manager), interview by author, January 2005, Indiana Dunes State Park.
Prairie Club sponsored outings to promote preservation efforts among the local citizenry. These groups ultimately persuaded the state legislature to establish a state park.  

Development of Indiana Dunes State Park in this chapter is as important as the changes to the land being made just outside park perimeters that continually threatened the park’s existence. Commercially destructive construction around the park forced the state and public to examine internal and external factors that impacted the park’s creation and preservation. This can best be seen in the state and public’s attitudes toward regulation, impacting state park development, annual visitation, administration and maintenance, and programming which further explain its placement as “moderately developed” in the State Park development continuum.

Figure 5. Recent map of Indiana Dunes State Park.  

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25 Ibid.  
Creation of the Indiana Dunes State Park was difficult and included a struggle among commercial and conservation interests. Thus, this period is characterized by the state and public’s desire to preserve a portion of the state’s last remaining dune environment.

Among the many individuals credited with the park’s establishment was first National Park Service Director and Chicagoan, Stephen T. Mather. In 1916 he proposed the creation of a 12,000-acre “Sand Dunes National Park,” rather than a state park, to Franklin K. Lane, Secretary of the U.S. Department of the Interior, which oversaw the recently-created National Park Service. In his report on the proposed national park, Mather discussed a hearing held earlier that year where park proponents and opponents presented their arguments, writing:

Among the speakers who urged that the sand dunes be preserved as a national reservation were many men and women prominent in educational, art, literary, scientific, and business circles of several States. The hearing, therefore, did not proceed as a gathering of local citizens expressing convictions based on purely local considerations, but gave me an opportunity to gain the benefit of the thought and serious study of broadgauge minds which were not influenced by selfish motives.27

As a result of Mather’s report, the Prairie Club of Chicago argued that at least a portion of the Indiana dunes region should be protected. In 1912, the Club, an organization of nature students and scientists, began to make routine visits to the dunes where they built

their “Beach House.” It stood as a landmark on the lake front where multiple protests and meetings were held for preservation efforts. The Prairie Club, along with other individuals and organizations, made themselves heard. They became the subject of multiple newspaper articles, which ultimately aided in publicity of the dunes campaign. The 1916 movement for dunes found support from United States Senator Thomas Taggart (D-Indiana).28

Because World War I shifted attention from park preservation to national security, the plan for establishing a national park at the dunes was postponed. In 1919, with the war’s end, activists again turned to the state legislature for help. Landscape architect Jens Jensen of Friends of the Native Landscape invited Richard Lieber, first director of the newly-created Indiana Department of Conservation, to visit the lakeshore. Impressed with the unique environments lying among the remaining dunes, Lieber took his concerns and letters from citizens to state politicians. He won over Governor Goodrich, who in 1921 strongly urged the necessity of a state park during his final address to the General Assembly. His successor, Governor Warren Terry McCray advocated the plan, and in 1921 the Assembly delegated Senators Robert L. Moorhead and Charles J. Buchanan to further investigate the state park proposal.29

In 1923, a bill for a Dunes State Park was introduced to each house of the legislature. Emphasizing immediate attention, speakers told legislators of the fifteen miles of dune lands that had been invaded by commercial development. Only six remained. The value of this land was steadily increasing and plans for cheap lakeside resorts were under way. Then, in 1923, after almost a decade of debate, Lieber won

29 Indiana Dunes State Park: A History and Description; Troy, 38-39.
authorization for a 2,182-acre state park with three miles of shoreline on Lake Michigan. However, authorization for the park did not include appropriations for land acquisition, and use of tax money to purchase such designated areas had not yet been approved.

To acquire funding, Bess Sheehan, of the Indiana Federation of Women’s Clubs, called local citizens to action. She secured thousands of donations, which included pennies schoolchildren collected and monetary gifts from corporations like U.S. Steel and Sears, Roebuck & Company. In December of 1925, the initial 334-acres were acquired for $368.75 per acre, with an additional $25,000 allocated for improvements. Unique to Indiana’s acquisition was the state tax levy of two mills per $100 of assessment that provided funds for the purchase of private land. The final acquisition of 2,182 acres was completed in 1931. The total cost of the dunes was $1,000,000.00.  

Lieber’s vision for the park was simple: develop the lakeshore in one area and keep the interior dunes untouched. He intended the park to be preserved yet “serviceable for public welfare organizations; a place where we can bring the weary and hopeless ones, especially bring the little orphans into the sunlight.” That is what the state park did.

In the late 1920s, land development took place just outside park perimeters. Called Beverly Shores, it was an immediate success, attracting eager Chicagoans who wished to build homes or summer retreats in the area. This drew even more people into the region, impacting the number of park-users.  

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30 *Indiana Dunes State Park: A History and Description*; Troy, 38-39; Schaeffer and Franklin, 30-31; Ron Cockrell, *A Signature of Time and Eternity: The Administrative History of Indiana Dunes National Lakeshore, Indiana* (Omaha: US Department of the Interior, 1988), also available online at [http://www.cr.nps.gov/history/online_books/indu/adhi1a.htm](http://www.cr.nps.gov/history/online_books/indu/adhi1a.htm) (accessed 5 February 2006); Mather, 8.

31 Ibid.

32 Ibid.
With title to the land, Indiana undertook an extensive building program. The park’s upgrading included the expansion of a concrete parking lot on Waverly Beach Road to accommodate 850 cars, construction of a park gate, and entrance road. Cables to supply electricity were laid underground, eliminating the dangerous and unaesthetic overhead wires. The engineers developed trails, connecting the park’s three largest dunes: Mounts Tom, Holden and Jackson. The IDNR built a campground, and a privately owned tourist hotel opened nearby. Crews finished the limestone pavilion in 1929, most likely the greatest development in the park, which contained a restaurant and store on the lower level, and a bathhouse on the second. On one of the nearby dunes, the park’s crew converted an old cottage into the “State Cottage,” which became a summer home for Indiana governors. The construction of Burns Ditch, a large drainage canal that connected the Little Calumet River to Lake Michigan, was the final change to the land. The ditch helped drain the “Great Marsh” and thus permitted forestation. It also became the proposed site of another harbor.  

33 Ibid.
With the establishment of Indiana Dunes State Park came some significant changes in the land. They were not as large scale and detrimental to the region as the neighboring steel mills. But park construction, unlike its commercial counterpart, was for the recreational benefit of the state’s citizens.  

The state park opened its gates on July 1, 1926. In the first three months of operation, nearly 63,000 visitors enjoyed the area. Mather was correct in his assessment of the area when he wrote: “The dunes offer to the visitor extraordinary scenery, a large variety of plant life, magnificent bathing beaches, and splendid opportunities to camp and live in the wild country close to nature.” Visitors primarily used the park in the summer months for swimming, camping, and hiking. However, the park offered year-round attractions and activities, which included cross-country skiing and hiking. The creation of

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35 *Indiana Dunes State Park: A History and Description*; Troy, 38-39; Schaeffer and Franklin, 30-31; Cockrell, Chapter One; Mather, 8.
the state park and development of its amenities encouraged visitation, which showed consistent growth.\textsuperscript{36}

The state park’s popularity continued to climb until it led all others in admission fees in 1947, with a revenue of $267,000. The appeal of revenue generated by the park resulted in the state’s exploration into ways to introduce more hospitality facilities. The ideas of proper land use and the ideals of good stewardship began to conflict.\textsuperscript{37}

Indiana Dunes was primarily administered, as other state parks throughout the state, by the Department of Conservation. Its small staff was composed of a few rangers and a park director or manager who oversaw operations and was the park’s liaison with the state. Early maintenance, as at Sterling State Park, consisted of trail and amenity repairs and garbage removal.\textsuperscript{38}

Park programming was ongoing. Organizations that made Sunday trips to the dunes continued to educate the public about the special environment. In 1927 the state began a naturalist program for the state parks, and implemented it at the Dunes, Turkey Run, Clifty Falls and McCormick’s Creek. This encouraged a large amount of user-friendly programming, facilitating further growth in visitation. By 1933 the state concentrated a much larger degree on camping.\textsuperscript{39}

The park’s development in the early years reflected the state and public’s attitudes toward the environment through administration and maintenance efforts, booming visitation, and the emergence of park programming. Development of the recreational area

\textsuperscript{36} Schaeffer and Franklin, 30-31, 51; Cockrell, “The Early Years”; Mather, 8; Troy, 39.
\textsuperscript{37} Carl Lewis, “The Indiana Dunes,” \textit{The Indianapolis Star Magazine}, 25 July 1948; Cockrell, Chapter Two.
\textsuperscript{38} In the late 1930s, plans for a Boy Scout camp were created, named Camp Brady after Lieutenant Thomas Brady who commanded American forces against the British at a battle nearby in 1780. The camp was never fully developed and later became a youth campsite at the park, which is mostly utilized by Boy Scout groups, Schaeffer and Franklin, 31.
\textsuperscript{39} Schaeffer and Franklin, 31; Department of Natural Resources, “DNR Historical Timeline.”
also resulted in the establishment of park administration and maintenance that adhered to
the IDNR’s mission and met the public’s demands for preserved wilderness and a
recreational area. Visitation continued to rise, introducing new threats to the dunes region
that would plague the middle years.40

*The Middle Years: 1934-1982*

Throughout this period, external development increasingly threatened the state
park and the surrounding area’s unprotected dunes. The state’s administration and
maintenance of park facilities and land during this time grew increasingly important, as it
set precedents for and encouraged further conservation action in its outlying dunes.
Visitation rose as programming and facility development continued to meet user
demands. Thus, administration and maintenance, visitation, and programming in the
middle years represent the state and public’s desire to have preservation and recreation in
Indiana’s unique natural areas.41

The threat that commercial development posed to the dunes in the middle period
resulted in the establishment of dune-specific preservation organizations. In June, 1952,
twenty-one women congregated at Dorothy Buell’s home to listen to Bess Sheehan, who
had participated in the enactment of the state park’s proposal. The group had discovered a
1949 Army Corps of Engineers report advocating a deepwater port for Indiana to be
created at Burns Ditch. The women, who formed the Save the Dunes Council, did not
directly oppose the port but called for the addition of five miles of lakeshore to the state
park. However, the state’s opposition to adding more land to the already large state park
was apparent, in part because political and business communities sought to maximize

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40 Department of Natural Resources, “DNR Historical Timeline.”

41 Ibid.
economic development in the area. The concept of offering more precious and already limited lakeshore to the park was inconceivable to economic planners working to secure federal funds for their port, which would expand existing steel mills and attract more industry and settlement to the area.\textsuperscript{42}

Two years later, after expanding the Save the Dunes Council’s membership beyond Indiana and making alliances with other conservation organizations, Buell and members established an advisory board of scientists, artists, writers, conservationists, and philanthropists. Press coverage of the battle increased, and eventually the Council won much notoriety and support. Its plan of attack was focused on education, and much of the programming took place in the state park which showcased the environments they were working to protect. Members argued that it was unethical to use tax dollars for the benefit of two steel companies: Midwest and Bethlehem. The two sides of the debate for the harbor created new interpretations of “wise use” ideals expressed in IDNR goals and mission statements. Then, in 1955 the state legislature approved funding to purchase 1,500 acres at Burns Ditch for the harbor.\textsuperscript{43}

Land values increased drastically, selling for nearly $3,000 an acre. The Save the Dunes Council urged the Indiana congressional delegation to initiate protective legislation that would incorporate the remaining and threatened dunes into the National Park System, since state funding for an addition to the park was refused. The Council, unsuccessful in finding an Indiana representative to support their plans, began looking for

\textsuperscript{42} Cockrell, Chapter Two.  
\textsuperscript{43} Cockrell, Chapter Two.
outside help. In 1957 they won-over Paul H. Douglas, a United States Senator from neighboring Illinois.  

![Figure 7. Proposal site of Indiana Dunes National Lakeshore.](image)

By the mid-1960s the dunes’ future became clearer. The dunes controversy was magnified by the National Park Service’s Great Lakes Survey, which evaluated the feasibility of a federal park just outside the state park. Simultaneously, in 1966 and to no avail, ground was broken for the Port of Indiana scheduled to cost $92 million. It seemed as though Indiana had become an economically geared state, forgetting the area’s natural significance. Its popular state park had become increasingly prone to over-use and was in need of financial support.  

In 1963, after numerous debates and a number of approved and rescinded bills, the National Park Service began to identify areas that could replace the dunes and land lost to construction by the port and Bethlehem Steel Mill. In response, the Bureau of the

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46 Cockrell, Chapter Two; Schaeffer and Franklin, 28-29; Peeples, 84-88.
Budget, working with the Corps of Engineers, Dunes Council and its advisory board, and steel companies, recommended the creation of an 11,700-acre national lakeshore. The National Park Service then outlined an Indiana Dunes National Lakeshore, which would preserve remaining lakeshore and undisturbed environments. Finally, in his February 8, 1965 State of the Union speech, President Lyndon B. Johnson, who knew the history of the debate from his years in Congress, declared that the number of parks, seashores, and recreational areas in the United States did not meet the needs and desires of its growing population. Johnson proposed large appropriations from the newly-created Land and Water Conservation Fund to be used as a resource that would make the 1960s a “Parks-for-America” decade. He listed twelve proposed national park areas. The Indiana Dunes National Lakeshore was one. By 1966, Indiana residents and the nation had their National Lakeshore.47

Seemingly pushed to the background during the debate, the Indiana Dunes State Park was continually busy. Throughout the 1950s and 1960s, the park constructed more trails, employed seasonal lifeguards, and upgraded some utilities. Its most notable development between 1968 and 1972 was the renovation of the pavilion. The first floor remodeling included a building upgrade, with concessions and covered entries on both ends of the structure; men and women’s locker rooms with toilets and showers; a receiving and trash room; lifeguard post and first aid office; and a janitor and utility closet. The second floor plan contained bathrooms, a gift shop, cooler and freezer plus food storage, a kitchen, and dining room. Also, in 1975, the park created an extension of the Calumet Bike Trail, facilitating access between the National Lakeshore and surrounding communities. Other park developments included picnic shelters and group

47 Cockrell, Chapter Three, Chapter Four.
shelters with new, nearby restrooms, and a campground store in 1984. Continuation of park development thus represents its importance as a recreational and natural resource, which was significant for the preservationists and conservationists struggling to save surrounding unprotected dunes.\footnote{48 Indiana Dunes State Park Office, Park Design Files, Blueprints.}

Outside the National Lakeshore and Indiana Dunes State Park, the dunes region population approached twelve million people. For 1969, the first year of National Park Service presence in the Lakeshore, visitation estimates were 1.2 million people and these were expected to surpass two million by 1980. The National Lakeshore, which grew in popularity, began to overwhelm the State Park it literally surrounded. Facilities and amenities differed between the newly-constructed Lakeshore and the dated yet functional Park. Staff numbers also affected maintenance, with the federally-funded Lakeshore’s large staff composed of numerous rangers, law enforcement, lifeguards, and management in comparison to the self-supported Park’s smaller list of similar employees. The differences became even more apparent when visitors to the State Park sent letters complimenting their stay to the Lakeshore by mistake. Others were surprised to find out they were in a State Park after paying the entrance fee rather than the National Lakeshore.\footnote{49 Cockrell, Chapter Six; Webb, interview; Paulene Poparad, “State Park, Lakeshore Maintain Close Ties,” The News-Dispatch, cited in Indiana dunes National Lakeshore and Indiana State Parks, 30 June 1991.}

However, the confusion that visitors encountered was offset by the State Park’s benefits of having a neighboring National Lakeshore. Douglas Wickersham, a former state park property manager, said of the relationship: “It’s like having a big brother. They make our life easier. It’s a plus for us because of the resources they offer us. They’re
always more than willing to help. To me it’s been a delight to work with them.” Since both parks shared similar goals of recreation, education, and environmental protection, it made it easier to work together. The major difference between the two was of course funding. The Park charged entrance fees and thus had only one entrance road. Also, two-thirds of the State Park was a nature preserve, so access was only by foot. Because of the Lakeshore’s large size, it was able to offer more large-scale activities, which supplemented the state park’s. A final benefit was federal studies. Instead of abruptly stopping them at park boundaries, scientific examinations continued into the State Park because of the unvarying environments. The collaborative efforts between the two, despite differences, positively affected the state park’s existence.\(^{50}\)

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\(^{50}\) Poparad.

According to administration and maintenance, visitation, and programming, the middle phase of park development reflects the state and public’s desire for conservation and recreational experiences. Large visitation numbers in the middle years resulted in the degradation of the park’s wildlife. Most notable during this second period was the establishment of the National Lakeshore and its relationship with the state park. Together, the two worked to maintain the region’s natural integrity. They also provided large areas of protected wilderness and designated regions for recreational activity to meet user demands. Acting as an older brother that watched over the state park, the National Lakeshore further encouraged wise use, proper management, and visitation to the area. Federal regulation impacted the state’s, and vise versa.\(^{52}\)

\textit{The Later Years: 1983-2005}

The later years of park development were characterized by the state and public’s enduring demands for recreational and natural areas. Renovation of specific areas and the continual introduction of educational programming reflect an environmental awareness among the state and public during this phase, although there were times when the park was overlooked and neglected. Similarly, visitation increases nearly resulted in overuse. This last phase of development, as conveyed in administration, maintenance, visitation, and programming, ultimately reflected the state and public’s attitude toward the environment.\(^{53}\)

By 1989, the Indiana Dunes State Park, like many other state preserves, suffered from overuse and inadequate funding. The state deployed a team from the Office of Fiscal and Management Analysis to evaluate the extent of the damage, which could

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\(^{52}\) Webb, interview.  
\(^{53}\) Ibid.
jeopardize the future of natural areas. The report pointed out that there was a significant loss of trees and vegetation as a result of areas where the earth had been worn bare by over a million visitors annually. Indiana Dunes was one of four state parks that continually reached unacceptable levels of visitors each summer, particularly on the weekends. According to state park reports,

On weekends, traffic problems along the highway to the park area severe, and both lanes of traffic back up for a mile. Every summer weekend picnic area sites and parking are filled by 9 am. People must come early to get a table, which causes latecomers to picnic in undesignated areas, such as the dune ridges where they trample sand and vegetation. The park sometimes must close its gate by late morning because it is filled to capacity.54

Park staff also put up fences and added railings to trails to keep park-goers from trampling nearby vegetation and eroding preserved areas. Nevertheless, wonderers and explorers remained unaware of the damage they were doing to the special dune environments.55

In 1988, to help prevent off-trail hiking and educate the public about the dune region’s special environments, the state park began planning for a nature center. The building, which opened a few years later, housed interpretive exhibits. It was also home to the park’s naturalist who offered guided hikes, crafts and demonstrations, and hosted talks. Then, in the summer of 1992, the state naturalist program was hit with a budget cut, which eliminated all seasonal naturalists. This meant fewer programs and nature center

55 Ibid.
hours. This did not last long because of the public reaction and media coverage; seasonal naturalists were reassigned by 1993. In the mid-1990s naturalists initiated programs and plans for resource restoration and management of state park lands. Despite another budget cut in 2000, by 2003 the state had eighteen full-time naturalists and approximately fifty seasonal to accommodate the growing number of visitors.\textsuperscript{56}

Instead of counting cars or each park-user in order to track visitation, the state park kept logs of revenue generated from entrance fees. These numbers continued to climb, then leveled off in the later years of park development. From 2001 to 2004 the park produced almost $400,000 annually, just in gate fees. Additionally, between 2001 and 2003 the campground brought in around $250,000 a year. The sale of fishing licenses, small donations, and shelter house rentals also contributed to the park’s income.\textsuperscript{57}

In 2004 the state allocated funds for renovation of the park’s campground. The new one contained 136 sites laid out on sand with a small paved lot, electrical hook-ups, and a picnic table. Additionally, all campground users had access to a number of drinking water fountains and two new shower houses. The newly-paved roadway that wound through the area made it easy for bicyclers and rollerbladers to get around. During construction, the developers were careful not to damage too many trees; each campsite thus had sufficient shade. For beach access the designers constructed a short, level trail. The park also had a "Youth Tent Area" separate from the public campground. Geared


toward camping, the area was easily accessed and numerous other trails that wound through the dunes were readily accessed from the new campsites.58

State park programming continued through the 1980s and 1990s with the establishment of Project Learning Tree and the Outdoor Lab programs to help teachers bring forestry-related lessons into the classroom. In 1990 the state passed legislation allowing the IDNR Division of Forestry to give a free tree seedling to every third grade student in the state. Also, to keep Hoosiers involved in maintaining their local forests, the IDNR created the Community and Urban Forestry Program. With a growing awareness urged by continual educational programming, the state and its citizens had come to respect, protect, and participate in conservation of unique natural areas.59

The later years of the park’s development symbolized the state park’s durability and ongoing relationship with the Lakeshore. A renovation of the park campground and the introduction of educational programming conveyed an environmental awareness by the state and public, despite periods of neglect. The continued presence of the dunes was an important testament to the state’s attitude toward natural resources. 60

Conclusion

Todd Webb has been the Indiana Dunes State Park, Park Manager for almost a year. His responsibilities are to carry out the Park’s mission statement, “To manage, interpret, and increase appreciation for the property’s unique natural and cultural resources for present and future generations.” Specifically, he is in charge of the administration of park operations, keeping a watchful eye over the staff; maintaining the

58 Department of Natural Resources, “DNR Historical Timeline.”
59 Today, the state boasts of nearly 4.5 million acres of forest (up from two million in 1990), Ibid.
60 Webb, interview.
park, ensuring that the park’s beach is clean and numerous parking lots have been cleared of accumulated sand each spring; and to increase appreciation for the area.\textsuperscript{61}

The presence of Indiana Dunes State Park was important evidence of the state and public’s desire for conservation, just as the Lakeshore represented the views of the federal government and the American public. Similarly concerned for the area’s integrity, the historic Save the Dunes Council continues to promote the preservation of the region’s environments. The Council represents the public, just as Webb symbolizes the state. Together, the two have maintained a natural area and provided citizens from all over with unique recreational opportunities. The close relationship that the state park formed with the Lakeshore exemplified the environmental values in the region, despite the decades of debate about whether there should be commercial development of preserved wilderness. In the end, Indiana Dunes became the happy medium by compromising and doing both. This is why it has earned the position of “modest development” in the state park spectrum.\textsuperscript{62}

In the “early years” of Indiana Dunes State Park’s creation, local movements for the preservation of its unique areas influenced the acquisition of park properties and eventual implementation of Lieber’s goals for the area. Alteration to accommodate recreation and multiple users and the protection of natural habitats were important parts of his vision and were promptly implemented. As the park was developed, visitation grew. Large numbers of annual visitors began to degrade the preserved area’s wildlife throughout the early period on “middle years.” Most notable during the second period was the establishment of the National Lakeshore and its relationship with the state park.

\textsuperscript{61} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{62} Indiana Dunes State Park: A History and Description; Troy, 38-39; Schaeffer and Franklin, 30-31; Cockrell, Chapter One, Chapter Two; Mather, 8.
Together, the two worked to maintain the dunes’ integrity, providing large areas of protected wilderness and designated regions for recreational activity. Acting as an older brother that watched over the state park, the National Lakeshore further encouraged wise use, proper management, and visitation to the area. In the beginning the Lakeshore overshadowed its smaller counterpart, yet today the two support each other and have established an important relationship between federal and state bodies. Finally, the “later years” of the park’s development symbolized the state park’s durability and ongoing relationship with the Lakeshore. A renovation of the park campground and the continual introduction of educational programming reflect an environmental awareness among the state and public, although there were times when the park was overlooked and neglected, as well as overused and almost overrun.\(^\text{63}\)

Indiana Dunes and Sterling State Parks emerged from similar beginnings: marsh environments with an abundance of natural resources that resulted in early settlement; regulated use by various hunting organizations; a debate between locals and members over use; and a growth in settlement and booming industry threatening unique environmental spaces. In response, Indiana and Michigan began to articulate environmental values. At this point the two states parted, as could be seen with the two parks under study. Michigan took the route of early preservation, compromising with local organizations and industry, working with the Army Corps of Engineers on dredging projects and containment, and addressing the public’s desire for only a slightly developed recreational setting. Indiana, on the other hand, began a struggle for conservation and wise use, its residents argued on two sides: one for commercial expansion, the other for the preservation of the last remnants of special natural areas. Eventually, the state reached

\(^{63}\) Webb, interview; Poparad.
Lieber’s goals of state park creation. Indiana Dunes’ moderate development resulted in the creation of recreational environments among the natural that resulted in drastic changes in previously untrammeled wilderness by introducing large crowds of people, apathetic to its sensitive exclusiveness.64

Other similarities existing among the two systems included the introduction of an entrance fee system, discovering that they alleviated some of the states’ financial obligations and allowing more self-governance. It took Michigan nearly forty years to set up an entrance fee collection system, whereas Lieber instituted one in the beginning of Indiana’s endeavor with a state park system. Somewhat similar to Michigan’s primitive and naturally-focused state park settings, Indiana’s parks have provided their users with recreational options in wild and preserved environments. The major difference existing between the two is delay in creation of guidelines for implementation of protective legislation. This could be due to the commercial interests and social desires for conservation clashing in Indiana.65

As seen with Indiana, too much use in a recreational and preserved area can bring negative consequences. In Desert Solitaire, author Edward Abbey expressed his concern back in the 1960s about apathetic park-goers, unreasonable regulation, and the absurd levels of development in national parks that have resulted in what he calls “industrial tourism.” Abbey writes, “Most readers will feel, as do the administrators of the National Park Service, that although wilderness is a fine thing, certain compromises and adjustments are necessary in order to meet the ever-expanding demand for outdoor

64 Indiana Dunes State Park: A History and Description; Troy, 38-39; Schaeffer and Franklin, 30-31; Cockrell, Chapter Two; Mather, 8.
65 Webb, interview; Jim Longnecker (Senior Ranger), interview by author, January 2006, Sterling State Park.
recreation,” ultimately altering “protected” landscapes throughout the nation so that they cater to the public’s wants and desires. The consequences are predictable: development increases, visitation rises, and the parks suffer from “too much love.” Like their counterpart, state parks such as Indiana Dunes are also witness to this phenomenon. In the following chapter, the introduction of commercial interests into an Ohio park setting will be examined, representing a state park that has been “significantly changed.”

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CHAPTER III

MAUMEE BAY STATE PARK, OHIO: “NATURE’S RESORT”

Ohioans and, in particular, the residents of the greater Toledo area are especially lucky. All of us are the wealthy landowners of Ohio State Parks! In fact, Ohio has the fourth largest state park system in all fifty states, and ranks first in the country in number of visitors.

Augusta Askari ¹

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Introduction

Standing at the edge of Lake Erie at Maumee Bay State Park, sound is drowned out by thundering waves crashing against a 1,400 foot long sea wall. Acting as a concrete fence, the wall secures the precious land behind it that at one time was vulnerable to erosion. The winds whipping off the waves that had carried the land away now send chills down the spine that raise hairs on arms even on the warmest summer days. Glancing to the east one sees a stand of trees, hiding behind which is the park’s wetland. Just past the wetland and projecting into the lake is the tip of Little Cedar Point Wildlife Refuge, which used to be a sandbar that extended to the west across the bay to “Frenchtown” or Monroe, Michigan, where Sterling State Park is located. Next to Sterling is the coal powered Detroit Edison Power Plant with its red and white striped stacks jutting into the clear blue sky. To the east stands Enrico Fermi II Nuclear Power Station, just south of Detroit, Michigan. From there the eye catches a white boat gliding across the lake, seemingly unscathed by the angry waves. As it docks in Maumee Bay State Park’s marina, attention is drawn to another body of water inland and a series of buildings which extend to a beach. Making note of this development and remembering the walk through the luxurious, Cape Cod-inspired lodge, one’s memory drifts back to the drive into the park—the golf course just off the main road and the lodge’s crammed parking lot. Suddenly, the realization of being in a park consumes the mind, which begins to interpret these surroundings in a new way. The extensive development of the natural areas at Maumee Bay State Park represent “significant change” in this study’s
state park development continuum. Maumee Bay also reflects the state and public’s attitudes toward natural resource use and management of wilderness areas.³

The considerable alteration of natural environments at Maumee Bay has occurred in other state parks across the United States. However, Maumee Bay offers a unique representation of state values toward nature because it has been developed as a “resort park.” Today, the park consists of 1,332 acres and is home to a $16 million lodge, a “Scottish Links” style golf course (one of the best in the state), a man-made 100-acre inland lake, marina, amphitheatre, and rentable cottages. To prevent shoreline erosion and secure the land on which the lodge is built, the 1,400 foot long sea wall was constructed. Additionally, the park contains a number of trails, picnic areas, and a nature center. There is also a modified beach, prairies, and mitigated wetland. With all the changes being made to the land in the park, few areas have remained untouched while others have been modestly changed.⁴

In the previous chapters, state parks have filled two positions on the development continuum. Monroe, Michigan’s Sterling State Park represents “slight development,” maintaining as much of an unaltered environment as possible. Indiana Dunes State Park symbolizes a “moderately altered” recreational area that was designed to attract large numbers of visitors annually, while attempting to maintain the area’s unique natural setting. Similarly, the Ohio Department of Natural Resources (ODNR) has founded a system comparable to Indiana and Michigan, but the ODNR expresses different relationships and sentiments toward its natural spaces as reflected at Maumee Bay State Park. The development of a campground on one end of the park and extravagant lodging

³ Jim Brower (Park Manager), interview by author, November 2004, Maumee Bay State Park.
⁴ Maumee Bay: Ohio State Parks, Division of Parks and Recreation, Ohio Department of Natural Resources, July 2005; Brower, interview.
and facilities in the middle have resulted in the neglect of preserved areas throughout the park. Land alteration also caused a split in two groups: park users and employees. At Maumee Bay the implications of significant levels of development reflect the public’s desires for recreational areas and at times, a poor regard for the environment.\(^5\)

Maumee Bay’s development story has two important phases: early settlement and the evolving roles of Lake Erie that introduced commerce to the area; and the struggle between environmental protection and commercial interests existing among state and park employees as well as visitors. Each story represents the changing attitudes and caretaking roles the state and citizenry have taken towards the state’s many natural areas. This chapter will show how the ODNR and Maumee Bay signify a different state park model from Sterling and Indiana Dunes State Parks and how that model reflects Ohio’s attitude toward the environment.\(^6\)

Originally, the wilderness that existed before commercial development of the Maumee Bay region was extremely diverse, similar to its inhabitants. Prior to European settlement, Native Americans inhabited most of Indiana, Michigan, and northwestern Ohio. One of the only exceptions was the Great Black Swamp. It contained standing water, dense vegetation, and saturated soil during all seasons but the driest. It consisted of “an irregular strip about thirty miles wide, lying parallel to the east bank of the Maumee river from Lake Erie southwest to New Haven, Indiana,” and contained approximately 1,500 square miles of swampland (Figure 2).\(^7\)

\(^5\) Ibid.
\(^6\) Ibid.
By the 1700s, several Native tribes settled on the glacial plains extending south from Lake Erie. The Ottawa settled along the valleys of the Maumee and Sandusky Rivers. The Ottawa were most likely drawn to the area for the rich soil to cultivate corn, fishing opportunities provided by the lake, game inhabiting the forests, and quick travel enabled by numerous waterways. Additionally, certain groups of Hurons, or Wyandot, inhabited the swamp and marshy regions along the lakeshore near Sandusky. Here, Natives found an abundance of game, including geese, ducks, deer, and fish. Taking advantage of their water resources, the Wyandot traded with tribes in the area. The Miami Indians occupied the territory drained by the upper Maumee River, and lived similarly to the Wyandot and Ottawas. Led by Chief Little Turtle in the late eighteenth century, the

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8 ibid.
10 They exchanged corn meal, sunflower oil, furs, skins, rugs, mats, tobacco, roots, and herbs, Parkins, 509.
Miami continually defeated American removal and settlement efforts. Each tribe’s proximity to the Great Lakes facilitated access to a variety of natural resources and enabled trade.¹¹

Generally, Natives respected and wisely used the natural resources of the area. They had very functional and efficient lifestyles that easily adapted to the changes brought by the seasons. Further, the canoe enabled their societies to make use of the many waterways that surrounded the Great Lakes and facilitated migration originally hampered by the Great Black Swamp. Their migratory habits ensured the availability of food and other resources for survival. In addition, Natives successfully grew a large variety of crops, which they fertilized and rotated annually to minimize soil exhaustion. This has led to the popular perception that Natives were indeed good stewards of the land.¹²

Dominant Indian views and use of natural resources changed with Euro-American settlement. They introduced new ways of using the environment and ultimately lead to the exploitation of the area’s resources. In 1991 Richard White constructed a theory of the “middle ground”—the place where cultural change and transformation permitted “a mutual accommodation for whites and Indians to work and persevere together” and forged a network of relationships that encouraged further negotiations.¹³ A sample

¹³ As defined by Richard White in The Middle Ground: Indians, Empires, and Republics in the Great Lakes Region, 1650-1815, the “middle ground” is a hypothetical place where cultural change and transformation were capable, “a mutual accommodation to work and persevere together,” and establish a network of fluid relationships. European imperialists and Natives appealed to what they perceived as the others’ cultural values and needs, enabling a mutual accommodation. Focusing on the pays d’en haut, or Upper Country surrounding the Great Lakes and northeastern New England, White argues that the erosion of a “middle ground” led to the decline of Indians and their culture, White, 50.
middle ground relation occurred in interactions between Natives and inhabitants at a French fort on the Maumee River in 1680 and also when the first settlers, Gabriel Godfrey and Jean Baptist Beaugrand, built a trade house at the foot of the Maumee Rapids in 1790. These posts encouraged trade and relations between the two societies, producing increased consumption of natural resources. The introduction of metals through trade (or the middle ground) further promoted the creation of high-tech weaponry, facilitating increased hunting impacts. Nature became a commodity. Trade seemed to produce greed among Euro-American and Native populations, who over-hunted, over-fished, and over-farmed the northwestern Ohio wilderness to satisfy their own desires and fulfill European demands.  

The enactment of the Land Ordinances of 1785 and 1787 opened Ohio to settlement. Natives were removed from the territory starting with the Treaty of Greenville on August 3, 1795. Their displacement resulted in extensive resource exploitation by newcomers, who completely changed the face of the land.  

When the tide of settlers rolled into Lucas County in 1836 and 1837, the land was practically wilderness. These families faced the hardest kind of work: felling the forests and draining swampland for agricultural use and places to construct homes. They changed the landscape of the area drastically so it would support cultivation and sheep grazing. Undeveloped land was thought to be “land lying in waste.” By 1870, the county included 208,595 acres of “improved and unimproved” land. Uncultivated land amounted to 45,713 acres, with 7,280 acres recorded as pastureland. In 1880, 111,703 acres were being used as agricultural land. The cultivation and pasturage of land both increased

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14 Scribner, vol. 1, 47.
15 Ibid.
between 1880 and 1900, while heavy timbering decreased the amount of forest land. Land considered to be lying in waste varied, as definitions for the category more than likely changed. Cleared land with rich soil was prized by northwestern Ohio’s growing agricultural industry.\textsuperscript{16}

In 1893, the state established Jerusalem Township, the youngest rural community in Ohio. A mere twenty-five years earlier the area that comprised the northwestern corner of Ohio was largely swamp.\textsuperscript{17} The Great Black Swamp introduced a variety of obstacles for settlers as it did for Natives. In the beginning, travel was nearly impossible; the marshland was an inescapable trap for wagons and nearly impassable on horseback or foot. In addition, the moist climate was host to a large number of insects, which increased the occurrence of disease. On top of these inconveniences were the threats of Indians. All of these factors made settlement nearly impossible. However, the settlers persevered by developing a drainage system that rid the land of much standing water, making it passable, inhabitable, and farmable. Essentially, settlers transformed the once-inhospitable swamp into an agricultural mecca. This did not connote good stewardship but it defined progress, which was what early American society aimed to achieve.\textsuperscript{18}

The importance of Lake Erie to northwestern Ohio is reflected by the port, industry, and population located in and just outside of Toledo. Today, it is not only the juncture of regional and national commerce but presents a diverse environment with a rich history. Notably, in this part of the state most of the land has been developed and limited “natural” areas exist. Largely an agricultural and industrial region, changes in the

\textsuperscript{17} Scribner, vol. 2, 202-203.
land reveal how citizens have increasingly used and valued nature as a commercial resource. \(^{19}\)

Just outside of the city’s buildings, bustling traffic, and rural farms is Maumee Bay State Park. Its presence in the midst of such development was the result of an environmental awareness and growing desire of state residents to escape the technological havoc bombarding their everyday life. Together, these factors reveal attitudes toward natural resources and areas that have evolved since the days of the first inhabitants. Taken together they influenced the establishment of a state regulating body, which today oversees the state park’s administration and maintenance, and encourages visitation and user programming. Ultimately, the agency and park reflect the state and public’s attitudes toward the use of natural resources and wildlife areas. \(^{20}\)

Part I: ODNR

The state and public’s creation of an agency to regulate its natural resources and wilderness areas represent the people’s desire for conservation. The story began in 1825 with the construction of a canal system and creation of the Ohio Canal Commission for regulation of commercial traffic. In the 1800s the canal areas under development became increasingly popular for fishing, boating, and family outings. However, by 1848 a railroad system had become available, eliminating commercial necessity of the canals. As a result recreational use of canals and reservoirs became popular. In 1894 the state

\(^{19}\) In 1835 a border dispute between Ohio and Michigan ended. Both states were fighting over the geographic position of their state lines, realizing the importance of Toledo, a port city now lying in the northwestern section of Ohio on the southwestern edge of Lake Erie. Michigan and Ohio sent troops marching; the winner of the battle would get the city. However, the rough terrain surrounding Toledo, the Great Black Swamp, slowed Ohio’s troops, delaying the clash. Luckily, the slow down caused by the swamp prevented a physical dispute, and a last minute decision made by Congress granted Ohio claim to Toledo, film, *The Story of the Great Black Swamp*.  

\(^{20}\) Nash, 188.
dedicated Licking Reservoir for use as the state’s first public park. Two years later its name changed to Buckeye Lake. By 1902, the remaining canal lakes had been dedicated as parks.\textsuperscript{21}

In the early 1900s, the state began to realize the natural value of other developed and primitive areas. In 1924 Ohio began to set aside forested parks. The first was Hocking State Forest Park. Acquisitions of such areas continued through the economic depression of the 1930s. Subsequently, wildlife parks were developed. The attraction of these areas resulted in the generation of revenue from the state’s sale of hunting and fishing licenses, which paid for parkland.\textsuperscript{22}

During the 1940s the Conservation and Natural Resources Commission in the state Department of Agriculture was responsible for the newly-established lake and forest parks. However, the need for a centralized regulating body to establish consistent planning and management of state park areas continually attracted the attention of the General Assembly. In 1948, after a number of lengthy committee hearings, Amended Senate Bill 13 passed, creating the Division of Parks. It was to be responsible for operating and maintaining “sixteen parks, ten recreational reserves, two canalways, six waysides, and eighteen lake reserves.” Also included in the Division’s jurisdiction were three federally-owned reservoirs, operated under license for the United States Army Corps of Engineers.\textsuperscript{23}

This collection of properties came with a number of problems. Some of the areas were good, others were bad and questionable for use as State Parks. Their sizes varied

\textsuperscript{21} Charles C. King, ed., \textit{A Legacy of Stewardship: The Ohio Department of Natural Resources, 1949-1989} (Columbus, OH: Ohio Department of Natural Resources, 1990), 105.

\textsuperscript{22} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{23} Ibid, 105-106
from 14,000 acres to 26 acres. Combined, nearly 82,829 acres were assigned to the Division, representing the basis of Ohio’s State Park System.\textsuperscript{24}

In 1949 the Conservation Bill united a number of conservation agencies, creating one governing body named the Ohio Department of Natural Resources. The bill also outlined the department’s purpose:

wise use of natural resources of the state, to the end that the health, happiness and wholesome enjoyment of life of the people of Ohio may be further encouraged; that increased recreational opportunities and advantages be made available to the people of Ohio and her visitors; that industry, agriculture, employment, investment, and other economic interests may be assisted and encouraged.

The state placed value on natural resources for their recreational, industrial, agricultural, and other economic reasons. Ultimately, this denoted a commercial approach to land use similar to Euro-American settlers.\textsuperscript{25}

By the 1950s several state parks were under construction and witnessed a large increase in attendance. This signified the state residents’ desires for recreational areas that would meet basic needs, including restroom facilities, change rooms and showers, campsites, and even small convenience stores. Increasingly, parks were becoming developed and their landscapes were changing, though slightly at first. Land stewardship

\textsuperscript{24} Ibid, 105-106.
\textsuperscript{25} Ohio Post-War Program Commission, “A bill to create a Department of Natural Resources in the Administrative Branch of the Government of the State of Ohio” (Columbus: F.J. Heer Printing Company, 1949), 3-4; King, 106.
seemed to be a high priority, but while the Division of Parks had regulated and conserved wilderness areas, it had also succeeded at introducing commercial interests.26

Increased popularity and development encouraged the demand for more and better regulation. To meet the new requests of the expanding park system, the state hosted the first annual Park Manager In-Service Training School at Lake Hope in October, 1951. Additionally, in March 1954, the ODNR opened the first Patrol School for Park Managers and Patrolmen at the State Fairgrounds, “to discuss law enforcement, duties, and requirements of the patrol officer.” Special park holdings continued well into the late 1950s with the purchase of additional acreage. This signified the state’s efforts to improve the standards and maintenance at its state parks.27

By the 1970s Ohio’s state parks had emerged from a period of expansion despite limitation of funding. The Division of Parks was renamed the Division of Parks and Recreation and nearly thirty million park-goers had visited the state’s many parks. Following this, the 1970s budget cuts forced forty-six state parks to close their gates after Labor Day. However, public outcries resulted in extending the parks seasons and ignited a period of renewed growth with an urban focus. Governor James Rhodes, in his second eight-year administration, continued his strong support for the ODNR and state park system. This included the vision of State Representative Barney Quilter from Toledo for Maumee Bay State Park. Thus the swing toward even more recreationally-geared and developed areas continued.28

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26 Daniel R. Atzenhoefer, ed. *A Legacy of Stewardship: The Ohio Department of Natural Resources, 1949-1989* (Columbus: Ohio Department of Natural Resources, 1990), 108.
28 King, 111, 113, 116.
Other states’ park systems were growing and developing at the same time. In fact, the sizes of state park systems more than quadrupled since the 1970s. In their report, Phyllis Myers and Sharon Green attribute stewardship of these areas as being driven by the importance of a park’s natural resources’ to historic and contemporary society. They contend that, “Despite the general mandate to preserve and protect resources given to many state park systems, only limited funds and personnel have been directed to resource stewardship.” Maumee Bay State Park is an excellent example of this claim.29

*ODNR Mission Statement*

The state’s value of natural resources is conveyed in the ODNR mission statement: “To ensure a balance between wise use and protection of our natural resources for the benefit of all.” This utilitarian-conservation sentiment testifies to the state and public’s right to use resources and wilderness areas as deemed appropriately, as long as the activity meets the demands of the public. While there is no specific mention of facilities or development in the mission, it is apparent that the goals are conservation and recreational use.30

Ohio and Maumee Bay State Park have done an adequate job of taking care of the land. While the state and park designers decided to alter various landscapes, they did so in the most positive ways possible. Maumee Bay meets the Division of Park’s mission statement--“To provide an outdoor recreational experience for Ohio State Park visitors that exceeds their expectations”--but in the coming years may conflict with the ODNR’s stated goals. If “industrial tourism” and increasing commercial interests should triumph

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over environmentalist sentiments, (currently struggling against each other) the park may be transformed into yet another venue for Toledo’s industrial sector.  

Part II: Maumee Bay State Park

In the early 1970s State Representative Barney Quilter, while on a routine Sunday drive, came across a unique area lying just east of the bustling city of Toledo. He proposed the construction of a park at the site. At first, he had a vague idea of what a park should consist of, basing his ideas on what he knew. For example, he remembered from visits to parks in Michigan that it should have campgrounds, beach access, and picnic areas. However, Quilter wanted this park to stand out, to be unique, which it would need to be with the state’s limited funding. What he proposed at Maumee Bay was a lodge. His ideas were incorporated in what the park has become. Quilter’s vision also explains the placement of this state park as “significantly changed” in the development continuum. At Maumee Bay the state and public’s attitudes toward the use and maintenance of natural areas are revealed, despite Quilter’s hope of maintaining the site’s environmental integrity. The development of parkland into a recreational area, administration and maintenance of its perimeters, visitation, and programming all reflect the state and public’s sentiments toward the use of natural resources and wilderness areas.

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31 Ibid.
32 Brower, interview.
Figure 11. Map of Maumee Bay State Park. The campground, which occupies the plots of land under discussion, comprises the far western portion of the park.  

The Early Years, 1975-1985

The early period of the park’s development was characterized by grand ideas with little financial support. The state and park designers had huge plans, but a series of budget cuts and continual lack of funding stifled them. Still the parkland was altered. A cut in park staff because of financial constraints resulted in degradation that hurt visitation and park programming. Starting as a period filled with hope, the early years ended with neglect, as represented in the ODNR’s administration and maintenance of the

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park, along with the public’s attitude toward nature, as conveyed by visitation numbers and participation in programming.34

In 1974 the ODNR announced that a park would be constructed at the site proposed by Quilter. During this time, Ohio was responsible for the third largest state park system in the United States. A year later, his vision became a reality when the state purchased 600 acres of lakefront property for development of a park. This involved a battle with nearly twenty private landowners. Two owned land that amounted to half the total acreage of the park: nearly 900 acres each. The struggle between the state and owners would continue until the final acre of parkland was acquired in 1990.35

Upon purchase of the land, the state needed a master plan for development. The designers were not sure what to include and what the area would provide. The only thing they were positive about was that the constituents’ and politicians’ wants changed daily. Even Quilter did not have a clear idea of what the park should contain, other than what he had observed in Michigan state parks which did not contain lodges and had more primitive areas with a few campgrounds, beach access sites, and picnic areas. What he knew was that he wanted to incorporate a lodge in the park’s plans.36

No one was sure how big or fancy to make the lodge. It was to be a private industrial investment, so park planners went to the state government to get a lease. Eventually, the state legislature approved a $16 million loan so the taxpayers would not be responsible for funding a commercial investment. Unfortunately, because of the lodge’s small size (it would contain a mere 120 rooms), the state could not convince any

34 Brower, interview.
35 “Maumee Bay State Park, 1982 Annual Report—FY 84 Budget Request, February 22, 1983,” Ohio Historical Society (State Archives Series 6572, Folder 13), Columbus, Ohio; Brower, interview.
36 Brower, interview.
large hospitality companies like Marriot to bid on the lodge. So, the legislature issued revenue boosting bonds to finance the facility’s development. With the lodge being part of the park’s plan, everything else revolved around its creation: the location and appearance of the campground, golf course, amphitheater, and beach.\(^{37}\)

The campground at the park, which opened in 1981, was the first phase in the park’s development. The area had 256 campsites, four shower houses, and two main ponds. The state, while trying to return the land to its original condition, tailored the park to the comfort of potential visitors. The campground was open year-round with electrical hookups. Additionally, workers planted 24,000 seedling trees in 1981, with $185,000 worth of larger hardwood trees and conifers in the campground alone. Tree planting signified a desire to transform the land into the forested wilderness that existed prior to settlement. Although, it should be noted that the earth was leveled to create flat camping sites and that holes were dug to develop the ponds. Also, a large majority of the trees that were planted were part of the campground’s “landscaping” in order to provide shade for the campsites.\(^{38}\)

By 1984 park land had grown to 1,556 acres with an additional 300 to be purchased. Maumee Bay State Park included two miles of Lake Erie shoreline, “nearly 200 acres of woods, 400 acres of marsh, 250 acres in the camp area (half of which was a prairie wildlife preserve), 550 acres of prairie wildlife area, and 220 acres of recently acquired farmland.” Designers also added a 2.8 mile multi-use trail around the campground, facilitating cross-country skiing, dog sledding, and nature walks. This

\(^{37}\) Ibid.

promoted development of paved bicycle trails, a pond for boating courses and skating, and a shooting area.\textsuperscript{39}

Park Manager Jim Brower has been in charge of the park since planning began in 1975. Brower, along with helping implement the first phase of development, was responsible for the administration and maintenance of the park. Funding remained a big issue in the park’s development and administration because the state legislature occasionally cut budgets with a resultant decrease in staff, management tools, and maintenance facilities. During this early period of administration Columbus employed nearly seventy park managers throughout the state, which was cut back to approximately forty, yet they were still responsible for running all parks. Brower claimed that while the state boasts of “building the park for you [the public],” claiming credit for popular recreational areas, Columbus falls short when it comes time to allocate money. This was why many park managers felt stressed and burdened by problems.\textsuperscript{40}

Throughout the 1980s budget cuts continued to impact the park’s maintenance and programming. Brower was the only staff employed and working in the state park during initial land acquirement. In 1981 Maumee Bay’s staff was expanded and consisted of a senior park ranger and four park rangers, an equipment operator, and a conservation worker. In 1983, the ODNR’s Division of Parks and Recreation instituted five goals, which were to focus on:


\textsuperscript{40} Brower, interview; “Penny-Pinching on Parks” \textit{The Toledo (OH) Blade}, 23 July 1983.
Lake Erie, develop major facilities near metropolitan areas, provide more handicapped-accessible facilities, increase environmental awareness programs and projects, and encourage strong community involvement.

But, the budget cuts impacted park maintenance and programming just as they had administration. Camping grounds went untended. Swimming hours were reduced. There was less restroom maintenance, and an atmosphere of neglect emerged. However, due to the magnitude of the funding shortage, the ODNR had to set up short-range measures to balance its finances. Therefore, the state adopted an increase in existing park-user fees to help offset the costs of inflation and budget restrictions. Rates rose at state-operated golf courses, rental docks, and sleeping cabins, although the policy of not charging for entry into state parks continued.41

Amplified development of recreational areas resulted in large visitation numbers. In 1982 attendance at Ohio state parks had reached 66 million, exceeding the attendance recorded at all other state park systems in the nation. In 1979, before the campground opened, park attendance at Maumee Bay peaked at 14,430. The following year, it had nearly doubled, reaching 29,685. The increase in visitation continued, although a brief lull coincided with a pause in development caused by inadequate funding. According to the park’s Annual Report from 1980,

Due to the undeveloped nature of the park and lack of facilities, special events have been somewhat of a rarity on the area. Thus far we have had one field trial by the Irish Setter Club of Toledo. Several Lake Erie

41 King, 118; “Penny-Pinching on Parks.”
shoreline and bird tours have stopped by the park for brief interpretations of the area by the park manager.  

Public relations with the park were promoted by community programs and projects that were geared toward the maintenance of the park, such as litter removal and thistle cutting. The Audubon, Future Farmers of America, Boy Scouts, Brownies, and other local organizations hosted special talks. Park rangers participated in various recreation shows at local malls and schools with “Rent-A-Camp” displays that promoted campground development. Park employees distributed trail maps for snowmobiling to local businesses, although the sport was discontinued within park boundaries shortly thereafter.

Administration and maintenance, visitation, and programming in the early years reflect the state and public’s desires for recreational areas, but budget cuts and conflicting interests resulted in their degradation. The state’s neglect of the park signified a lack of concern by the public for natural spaces and increased desires for developed recreational areas. However, upon discovery of their apathy and resultant series of temporary closures, Ohioans responded in the middle years when visitation and development increased again.

*The Middle Years, 1986-1995*

Land development and the state’s administration and maintenance of the park, as well as the public’s reaction to natural settings conveyed through visitation, reflected a declining environmental awareness during the middle years as seen in the state’s attempt to combine recreation with wildlife. A number of luxurious facilities resulted in the

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43 King, 117; Brower, “Maumee Bay State Park Annual Report, 1980.”
significant alteration of parkland. This showed two clashing viewpoints: those for conservation and protection of natural environments, and those for recreational development which introduced private industry to the state park. The ODNR’s administration and maintenance of Maumee Bay and public’s visitation and participation in programming during this phase convey conflicting attitudes toward the use of natural resources and wilderness areas.44

In 1988 ground-breaking for construction of the lodge at Maumee Bay began. It was completed in 1990 and the golf course in 1991, whereupon tourism shifted along with some of the state and park administrators’ attitudes. The profits that the park made, being minimal but enough to make it the only self-supporting park in the state, encouraged commercial attitudes. Increasingly, the ODNR’s funding subsided, leaving the park’s administrators with few bandages to cover the wounds caused by budget cuts. Brower was forced to eliminate positions, significantly decreasing his full- and part-time staff. The land in the park began to reflect the consequences of this, showing the wear and tear of use. Further, the completion of the lodge and golf course, as well as the cottages, pulled focus away from the campground and more natural areas of the park.45

By 1990 the state had completed property acquisition, and that spring the lodge and cottages were opened. From that point on, over consecutive years, the park witnessed large facility development. The golf course opened along with a number of day use areas. The remodeled park office welcomed staff, and a service area was created. With initial development of the park complete, final large scale alteration to the landscape resulted

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44 Brower, interview.
with the creation of the Trautman Nature Center, marina, and amphitheater in 1993. Today, the park stands as it did during that time.  

Figure 12. Maumee Bay State Park Amphitheatre.  

While restoration of historic environments has been classified as good stewardship, the state had extreme difficulties finding funding for a shoreline erosion prevention program. Beginning in 1981, the park and ODNR petitioned the state and federal government for fiscal support, with a total project cost estimated at $12 million. This would essentially save nearly 12 feet of shoreline annually lost to the turbulent waves of Lake Erie. By 1986 prominent individuals in state politics, such as Governor Richard F. Celeste and State Representative Marcy Kaptur, became involved. Construction on the seawall, separating the fragile land from the lake, began in 1987. These early efforts represent good stewardship and conservation of the land. However, as

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46 The park’s nature center was named after and dedicated to the late biologist, “Trautman,” Ohio Historical Society (State Archives file), Columbus; Brower, interview.  
annual visitation increased (the park is within a two hour drive of nearly 14 million people), so did park development.48

Visitation throughout this period of park development was consistent with the growing development of parkland. However, in 1994 a series of beach closings because of high bacteria levels in Lake Erie waters just off the park’s shores caused a decrease in visitation numbers. Tests indicated that bacteria, fecal coliform, had reached a concentration of two to four times the average for the bay, which many scientists had argued to be too high. The likely sources of pollution were a combination of storm and sanitary sewers in Toledo that overflowed during heavy rains and emptied into the lower Maumee and Ottawa Rivers. Another cause was sewage. It caused the lower Maumee River and Bay to be listed as one of forty-three sites of concern on the Great Lakes by the International Joint Commission.49 Other contributing pollutants were contaminated sediments from industrial, urban chemicals concentrated in the muck at the bottom of the rivers, and agricultural runoff which introduced phosphorus to the rivers and caused algae blooms. To address the problem, the state took a series of corrective measures, including the replacement of storage tunnels and sewers. The park watched the bacteria levels carefully, and water samples from the beaches were taken every Monday and sent to state


49 The International Joint Commission (IJC) is responsible for preventing and resolving disputes between the United States and Canada. The IJC functions under the 1909 Boundary Waters Treaty guidelines, and “pursues the common good of both countries as independent and objective advisor to the two governments.” Specifically, the Commission approves projects affecting boundary waters and if necessary, will regulate their operation. Moreover, the IJC assists the two countries in the protection of the environment, which includes the implementation of the Great Lakes Water Quality Agreement. The Commission’s work also includes but is not limited to alerting the governments to new issues that may cause conflicts, “International Joint Commission: Canada & United States,” Mission Statement, International Joint Commission, 14 March 2006 http://www.ijc.org/en/home/main_accueil.htm (accessed 16 March 2006).
health officials in Columbus for testing. Visitation rebounded by the end of the nineties despite brief periods of beach closings.$^{50}$

Park programming during the middle period of development also focused on interpretation and wilderness education. The completion of the park nature center helped the staff educate the public about the importance of the natural resources found in the region, such as the park’s protected wetland and prairies. The nature center was family oriented, with the goal of teaching every visitor about the environment, specifically the mitigated wetland lying just beyond the facility’s doors.$^{51}$

The park’s wetland is special not only because it is man-made; it represents the state’s wavering environmental sentiments. Before the lodge was constructed on the shores of Lake Erie, the site was one of the state’s best and most uniquely original wetlands. To build the lodge complex, the area was drained, vegetation and animal life removed, and sites leveled. According to ODNR and Environmental Protection Agency regulations, another wetland of equal acreage and value had to be recreated somewhere else to compensate for the one lost by park land alteration. The park mitigated a new wetland just to the east of the lodge, by allowing the land to sit unaltered with a semi-permeable wall that would draw water in from Lake Erie to create a marsh environment. The wall enabled the continuation of numerous natural events, such as fish spawning and the reintroduction of vegetation and wildlife. However, while the wall was able to return the area to an environment similar to its historic state, the barrier also introduced the possibility of flooding throughout the remainder of the park. To prevent this, the


$^{51}$ Brower, interview; Dana Bollin (Park Naturalist), interview by author, August 2006, Maumee Bay State Park.
designers constructed a levee, which also acted as an access road to the cottages. In return, the cottages and golf course were protected from damage due to high water levels.\textsuperscript{52}

Dana Bollin, the park’s naturalist, has constantly voiced complaints about the condition of the mitigated wetland. It lies dry for most of the season, facilitating the takeover of invasive plant species like \textit{Phragmites australis}. Bollin has found little help. In her opinion, the park has lost its natural flare. Interestingly, she has heard complaints from golfers and lodge visitors about mayflies, among other insects, and other wildlife like geese. Ironically, she insists that park users want “nature” removed from the park.\textsuperscript{53}

While the park managerial staff and the state foresaw the recreation of a wetland as a positive contribution to the park, other staff members and park-goers did not agree with the construction of the lodge and large-scale development going on throughout the park. The beginning of the clash between park staff, visitors, and the state over park maintenance began during this middle period and became one of the most apparent attributes of the state and public’s evolving attitudes toward natural resources and construction of recreational areas.\textsuperscript{54}

During the middle years of park development, competing sentiments about natural resource use and protection clashed while land alteration continued. However, with the completion of the nature center and introduction of staff devoted to preserving the last remaining wild environments within park boundaries, it seemed as though conservation forces had found some champions. The middle years thus represented the emergence of

\textsuperscript{52} Brower, interview; Bollin, interview.
\textsuperscript{53} Bollin, interview.
\textsuperscript{54} Brower, interview; Bollin, interview.
recreationally and commercially geared development attitudes. Their split impacted Maumee Bay’s administration and maintenance, visitation, and programming.  

*The Later Years, 1996-2005*

Park development during the later years was minimal. However, the continued maintenance and administration of the area was largely impacted by increases in park-users, an enduring lack of funding, and a rise in the state park system’s popularity, which increased visitation numbers. Yet, the split between two groups geared toward two different outcomes continued. Ultimately, administration and maintenance, visitation, and park programming reflected the state and public’s attitudes toward the environment in this last phase of development.

Construction in the park consisted mainly of general maintenance with the exception of a research facility built in 1997. A number of faculty members and students from nearby universities and colleges used the Lake Erie Research and Education Center for teaching and research. The facility was built in the northwest corner of the park. Finding funding from the state, United States Department of Agriculture, and involved institutions, the project totaled $6.8 million.

Increased development, use and popularity of the state’s parks led to national recognition. Ohio’s park system was named the best in the nation in 1998, with Maumee Bay State Park listed as one of its finest. The state’s policy of not charging entrance fees and providing its users with a variety of unique environments and recreational experiences in its seventy-three state parks encouraged this success. One journalist wrote

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55 Ibid.
56 Ibid.
of the state park’s prominence, stating, “The park…is different from most other state parks in one respect: it has never had the natural advantage of a mature growth of trees. It was literally built from the ground up.” The indication that the environments at Maumee Bay were man-made suggests that the citizens and state were able to tailor it to their every desire. This represents artificiality; however, the mitigated wetlands were testament to the state’s attempt at recreating a natural environment. Brower stated, “There were very few trees in this area when we made it a park,” typical of land previously used for agriculture. He went on to say, “every tree, every bush, every ditch, every swale, every pond, every creek that’s in here now was put here. When the state bought the land, the farmers had already had their way with it.” So, although the park’s development edged on simulation, the state’s attempted re-creation focused on the prior, natural settings.\(^\text{58}\)

The park’s success depended on visitation supplemented by user desires for recreational opportunities. Water quality remained an issue and affected park use throughout this period of the park’s development. High levels of bacteria in 1997, caused by a series of rainstorms and strong winds, alarmed visitors. However, the park golf course continued to attract large crowds. Its unique design made it one of the most distinguished in the state. It was also one of the most difficult. The holes, grass-covered and surrounded by man-made dunes and ponds, were designed to resemble “Scottish links-style.” An increase in golfers resulted in a rise of lodge and cottage rentals. Park visitation boomed. By 1999 attendance reached a record 1.5 million.\(^\text{59}\)

\(^{58}\) Mike Kelly, “A Treasure on the Lake: One of Ohio’s Smallest State Parks is also One of its Best,” \textit{The Toledo (OH) Blade}, 5 July 1998.

Budget cuts continually impacted the park by eliminating staff. In 2005, twenty-two of Ohio’s seventy-three state parks did not have any full-time employees, including rangers. Maumee Bay did not lose major staff positions, but lost much needed supplemental and part-time positions. Since 1989 the state reduced the number of full-time park positions, from 840 to 481. With increases in visitation and use, the maintenance of parks and responsibility of staff grew to impossible levels. However, the public responded to the neglect caused by budget cuts by voluntarily participating in “Friends Groups.” They helped with park projects and programs. The strong volunteer base enabled many parks to maintain their vitality.  

In an effort to generate revenue to reinstate employees, the state proposed the implementation of parking fees. The ODNR attempted to increase revenue by charging campsite and cabin fees, dock rentals, and licenses. In 2005 it also proposed charging a $5 daily fee per visiting vehicle, or $25 for an annual pass. Money raised would support park maintenance and operation. If enacted, Ohio would become the forty-fifth state charging a user fee. Implementation is still being debated. Currently, a half of 1 percent of the state budget goes to the ODNR. A fourth of that one percent is split among the state’s many parks.  

Park programming continued to bring in revenue and encourage visitation. Special events hosted throughout each season boosted the local community’s economy as well. Programming also helped boost private industry in the park and the ODNR. Inflated prices for facility and sporting rentals coupled with consumption of food and beverages

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generated funds. Maumee Bay became nearly 40 percent self-supporting. Additional funding will be the result of future developments. Expectations of Maumee Bay were projected to include a fence for the amphitheater, which would be enlarged to allow special events that park users would be charged to attend. With the additional attraction and an increase in revenue for the area, the commercial development would promise even more growth in park visitation.

Special programming also encouraged environmental awareness. The introduction of the Emerald Ash Borer to Maumee Bay led to campaigns from the state and the park’s nature center. Visitors were taught to avoid bringing their own firewood into the park. It was estimated that one in ten trees in Ohio was ash, and that the Maumee Bay region had the highest percentage of the trees in the state. Apathy at the time would have resulted in the devastation of the area’s unique, young forests. *Phragmites*, the invasive reed, also continued to pose a threat to the wetlands. In a 2005 interview, Bollin stated, “Unfortunately, our marsh in the park was very degraded, with lots of invasive species.” Increased awareness supported by firsthand experience could help the state and public prevent further damage to park wildlife.

Despite the gripes of visitors, some seemingly allergic to all of nature, the ODNR’s administration, maintenance, and programming at Maumee Bay State Park have enabled the conservation of a small portion of northwestern Ohio’s natural resources for recreational experiences. The Cedar Point Wildlife Refuge is just next door, dedicated to the kind of wildlife preservation that the park is incapable of providing. The park may

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62 Brower, interview.
63 *ibid.*
even keep those wishing for overnight recreational experiences from treading on the preserve’s resources. In addition, the park provides Ohioans and Michiganders with a positive recreational experience and saved this part of Maumee Bay from industrial development. Before the ODNR purchased the land, Volkswagen was looking to build a plant there. With continued commercial exploitation, the shores of Lake Erie near Toledo may have looked like Chicago or worse, Gary, Indiana.

Conclusion

Maumee Bay State Park is the public’s park. Upon meeting Jim Brower, he is quick to convey his feelings on this topic. According to him “a park is a living thing”—an entity that is very dynamic. It must be fixed if broken, maintained and protected. It will always be changing, as affected by use and political cultures that institute funding, budget cuts, alter organizational hierarchies, and change the park’s purpose and importance. Maumee Bay State Park’s creation took forty years to build from scratch. Brower says that the development never really stops; the state is continually acquiring property, building and designing it, and maintaining it into maturity, so there is something there to offer. The park is a product made into something that fits the model the state and citizens want, ultimately influencing how and why it was created. Yet, Brower carries negative baggage. He knows things in the park could have been done differently. So, he writes down his frustrations then washes his hands of lost causes.

The state of Ohio has indeed taken care of the land at Maumee Bay State Park, but if there is not a turnaround of the burgeoning apathy among some park users and

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65 Brower, interview.
66 Ibid.
state legislators who are consistently making budget cuts, the park may face the ramifications of poor stewardship. Following in the wake of the land owners who took care of the Maumee Bay area, it is now up to the citizens of Ohio to protect the resources and opportunities presented at their park. Nature has proven to be an important source for uncovering historic and current sentiments toward the environment, which seem to be constantly shifting. This has resulted in changing roles of the steward from cohabiter and equal, then commercial investor and friendly owner, to conserver.67

Thus, Maumee Bay State Park was the result of more than one person’s vision. Quilter, a state legislator who wanted to do good for his Toledo constituents, worked hard to convince his colleagues in Columbus that a park on Lake Erie was an important investment. Brower and his supporting staff have dedicated their lives, and in some cases their families, to the park. According to the state’s attitude toward natural areas as outlined in the ODNR mission statement, it is the government’s responsibility to set land aside and create recreational experiences and opportunities for its people. But because money is an issue, the public—taxpayers who fund the construction of recreational facilities—play a large role in park development, maintenance, and operation.68

At Maumee Bay’s inception, Ohio state parks were growing but funding was rather limited. With minimal chances of finding financial support, Quilter turned to the “Resort Parks” concept, which was known for large campgrounds, lodges, and day use and recreational areas. The addition of these facilities in a state park would generate revenue and enable continued development.69 Thus, the early period of park development was characterized by grand ideas supported by limited funding. A series of budget cuts

67 Ibid.
68 Ibid.
69 Ibid.
plundered huge plans for the park. Alteration within the park and a reduction in park staff ultimately resulted in its degradation. The early years ended with neglect. The “middle years” of park development represented the state’s attempt to combine recreation with wildlife. The creation of luxurious facilities resulted in the continued alteration of parkland. This in return facilitated the creation of two clashing viewpoints: conservation and protection minded users and staff versus those for recreational development. On the other hand, park development during the last period was rather minimal. The continued maintenance of the area was largely impacted by increases in park-users, an enduring lack of funding, and a rise in the state park system’s popularity. Lastly, the conflicting groups have battled to the present.70

Each state park’s history of creation and duration has reflected important relationships. At Maumee Bay it was the combination of recreation and industry with conservation, which has constantly sought a balance. Notably, changes in the land during the early phases of park development resulted in unbalanced levels of alteration throughout the man-made recreational area, varying from a $16 million lodge and mitigated wetland. Three periods of development at Maumee Bay further clarify the parks position as “significantly changed” in the development continuum.71

The state and public’s sentiments toward natural resources have also been reflected through the creation of a regulating body and state park. The ODNR’s administration, maintenance, and programming at Maumee Bay ultimately reflect the Ohio environmental attitude, which deteriorates in periods of economic stagnation and is at times disguised by facilities, such as lodges and golf courses. The recreationally

70 Ibid.
71 Ibid.
geared, man-made environments of Ohio’s Maumee Bay State Park represent an environmental awareness by presenting the public with natural areas that support wilderness experiences, despite its large levels of development that are notably different from Sterling and Indiana Dunes State Parks.\(^\text{72}\)

\(^\text{72}\) Ibid.
CONCLUSION

The fact remains, however, that today’s state park systems, like the national park system, started with random, unrelated efforts across the country to acquire and preserve exceptional properties for public use and enjoyment. Each of these efforts is an important part of our story, and a brief look at a selected few of them...provide historical perspective...

Ney C. Landrum

Standing on the shores of Lakes Erie and Michigan in the seventeenth century, most people today would be surprised by the natural setting. The bordering marsh regions were prone to continual flooding. Their damp climate played host to a number of animals and assorted vegetation; they also bred disease. Dunes created by centuries of waves and wind lined other, more distant shores. Their contribution to the lakes’ unique natural areas was a number of ecologically diverse environments located within immediate dune vicinities. Beaches, wetlands, and forests situated themselves intermittently between dunes, representing vegetative succession. Upon discovery and settlement, these environments and their natural resources increased in value as consumption limited their availability. Today, thanks to state and public sentiments, creation of conservation agencies, and development of state parks, some of the same lakeshore landscapes have been maintained or recreated to present what the areas’ first inhabitants encountered.

From primitive origins to industrial tourism, state parks have been developed for a number of reasons: to suit state and public desires for recreation, to conserve unique environments, and to maintain pieces of American history reflected therein. Sterling State Park, located in Monroe, Michigan, Indiana Dunes State Park, just east of Gary, and Maumee Bay State Park, situated just outside of Toledo, Ohio, have been created to meet these demands. Each

of these parks lie on the shores of a Great Lake and had a similar beginning as a marshy or dune environment that was invaded by settlement and commercial interests. However, sometime in the development process, their similarities split, and they were designed to represent different ideals.\(^2\)

Sterling State Park fits the mold of “slightly developed” in this study’s state park development continuum. Under the supervision of the MDNR, the park serves a twofold purpose: “to preserve Michigan’s natural resources and its places of historic interest, and to furnish vacationists, tourists, and pleasure-seekers with opportunities to enjoy land, water, trees, and wildlife in their natural state.”\(^3\) The implementation of this goal at Sterling during three periods of development proved that the attitudes the state government holds toward its parks system reflect larger public sentiments about the use of natural resources and protection of natural areas. Except in times of economic downturn, Michiganders have supported the development and preservation of state recreational areas. The geographic position of Sterling in the southeastern corner of the state, a commercial hub on Lake Erie and directly accessible to three states, has led to more alteration of natural areas than is found at the less populous and more primitive recreational areas found up north. But for the most part, the MDNR has aimed to provide its citizens with “slightly developed” areas that support recreational experiences. \(^4\)

In the “early years” of Sterling’s development, MDNR goals were reflected through minor alterations that created a popular area for recreational activities. However, this alteration and the introduction of large numbers of people influenced the park design and brought about large changes in the natural environment. The “middle years” were most notable for neglect


\(^4\) Ibid.
caused by budget cuts. Consequentially, revitalization of the park’s amenities fell short. By the end of the 1980s it seemed as though the state and public were learning the consequences of their apathetic attitudes. Drastic alterations within park administration during the middle years facilitated a period of change. Revival described the “later years.” The park received a much-needed and drastic transformation. The state and public’s environmental goals and attitudes evolved and were revealed in Sterling’s land development, administration and maintenance, visitation, and programming.\footnote{Jim Longnecker (Senior Park Ranger), interview by author, 12 January 2005, Sterling State Park.}

Conversely, Indiana Dunes State Park represented “moderate alteration” on the spectrum. Indiana’s parks abide by the IDNR’s Division of State Parks and Reservoir’s mission statement: “to manage and interpret our unique natural, wildlife, and cultural resources; to provide for compatible recreational opportunities; and to sustain the integrity of these resources for future generations.”\footnote{“DNR Overview,” Indiana Department of Natural Resources, 2006, \url{http://www.in.gov/dnr/about/orgoverview.html} (accessed 4 February 2006).} The goal of the Division was the interpretation and presentation of native Indiana landscapes, providing experiences and surroundings similar to those prior to settlement. These were similar to Michigan’s goals. Yet most notable in Indiana’s system was the compromise made with its nearby industrial giants, its public, and its legislators. A state- and nation-wide movement for conservation ultimately resulted in the creation of Dunes State Park.\footnote{“DNR Overview”; Phyllis Myers and Sharon N. Green, \textit{State Parks in a New Era: A Look at the Legacy}, vol. 1 (Washington D.C.: The Conservation Foundation, 1989), xi; “Division of State Parks and Reservoirs,” Indiana Department of Natural Resources, 2006, \url{www.in.gov/dnr/parklake/properties/stateparks.html} (accessed 4 February 2006).}

The “early years” of Dunes State Park’s creation were characterized by local movements for the preservation of its unique environments. Public outcry ultimately influenced the acquisition of park properties and implementation of IDNR goals, as outlined by Richard Lieber. Important factors in his vision included the alteration of natural areas to accommodate recreation
and multiple users. Additionally, he maintained the protection of natural habitats. All were promptly observed. Visitation grew with park development. However, throughout the “middle years” crowds of visitors began to degrade the preserved area. But most notable during the second period was the establishment of the Indiana Dunes National Lakeshore and the relationship it formed with the state park. Together, the two worked to maintain the dunes environmental and recreational integrity. Acting as an older brother that watched over the state park, the National Lakeshore further encouraged wise use, proper management, and visitation to the area. Today, the two support each other, forging an important relationship between federal and state regulating bodies. The “later years” of the state park’s development symbolized its durability and ongoing relationship with the Lakeshore. A recent renovation of the campground and continual introduction of educational programming reflect an environmental awareness among the state and public, despite times in the park’s existence when it was overlooked and neglected, then overused and almost overrun.8

Lastly, Maumee Bay State Park epitomizes “significant change” of natural environments on the state park development continuum. The creation of the ODNR and its responsibility to regulate natural resources and areas represent the state and public desire for conservation. However, transformation of wilderness to support commerce and recreation resulted in the introduction of new attitudes toward resource use. By the time the state reached its goal of developing a state park at Maumee Bay, private industrial interests challenged conservation ideals. For examples of how to incorporate the two, Ohio looked to other state park systems. When planning the park’s layout, the only thing designers were positive about was the inclusion of constituent and politician demands, which changed daily. They observed that Michigan’s state

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parks did not contain lodges and had more primitive areas. These consisted of a few campgrounds, beach access sites, and picnic areas. The intention of developers at Maumee Bay clashed with Michigan’s developmental goals: Ohioans wanted to incorporate a lodge, golf course, amphitheater, and other recreational facilities in the park’s plans.9

The ODNR’s mission statement defines the state’s goals: “to ensure a balance between wise use and protection of our natural resources for the benefit of all.”10 This characterizes Maumee Bay’s inception. In the park’s “early years,” Ohio state parks were growing but faced the consequences of limited funding. Conceived of as a “Resort Park,” expectations for the new park outweighed feasibility. Extravagant park plans were eventually eliminated in the face of a series of budget cuts. Alteration within the park and a cut in park staff ultimately resulted in neglect and degradation. The “middle years” of park development represented the state’s attempt to combine recreation with wildlife. The creation of luxurious “resort park” facilities resulted in the continued development of parkland. It also nurtured two clashing viewpoints: conservation-minded users and staff versus those for recreational and industrial development. Conversely, park development in the “later years” was minimal. The continued maintenance of the area was largely impacted by increases in park-users, an enduring lack of funding, and a rise in the state park system’s popularity. Conflicting group interests have carried on to the present. Today, however, the land has somewhat returned to its original state of being, as its man-made environments have matured. Ultimately, Maumee Bay represents the state of Ohio’s attitudes toward the use of natural resources and wilderness areas.11

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9 Jim Brower (Park Manager), interview by author, November 2004, Maumee Bay State Park.
11 Brower, interview.
While being different, each of the three parks shared minor similarities. They all combated the consequences of budget cuts: neglect, declines in visitation, and loss of important employees. Accordingly, each then entered periods of revitalization. Rectification of degraded facilities paired with increased visitation resulted in industrial tourism and introduced the threats associated with overuse. But ultimately it was the level of development and how each chose to deal with similar problems and opportunities that set them apart.

Thus, this study maintains that there are fifty different state park systems in the United States. Each system and park represents different ideals and attitudes toward the use of natural resources and unique wilderness areas. These sentiments convey state and public values of recreational areas. Ultimately, they can be classified under one of three levels of development established by this study’s state park development continuum. This classification presents the field of environmental history, which has been dominated by literature on national parks, with new, original work on state parks.

Consider hypothetically that the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources recently proposed the establishment of a state park and recreational area on Lake Superior. The state park’s designers wanted some ideas for how to develop the area, so they constructed an advisory panel containing Senior Ranger Jim Longnecker from Sterling State Park in Monroe, Michigan, Park Manager Todd Webb from Indiana Dunes State Park, and Park Manager Jim Brower and Naturalist Dana Bollin from Maumee Bay State Park in Toledo, Ohio. Each member represented a different park design since development of each state park reflected its respective state and public’s attitudes toward the use of natural resources and areas. How would each individual respond to questions about the park’s development? What about administration and maintenance? Programming? Ideally, each consultant would campaign for the creation of a park
similar to the one they worked to maintain, with the alterations that they themselves hope to see based on experience.

In sum, state parks clearly offer precious natural settings as an escape from the artificial, industrial, and technological surroundings that consume American lives daily. Parks are highly prized by the federal government, state regulating bodies, and the communities in which they are located, whether the parks include acres of rolling sand dunes edged by miles of Great Lakes lakeshore or wooded forests carved by winding rivers. State parks are institutions of nature.

What is unbeknownst to most of the American population is that these islands of preserved nature are not entirely regulated by natural forces. Many things impact the way a state park appears: previous land uses by prior owners, local communities, state departments of conservation and natural resources, and the federal government. Ultimately, these seemingly-separate groups impact how a park is developed, administered and maintained, and used.

As uncovered in each thesis chapter, settlement and the emergence of industry threatened the overuse and destruction of natural resources. This in turn caused a chain reaction of park creation. The onset of a national environmental movement also gave Michiganders and Hoosiers the base from which to start their campaigns for the creation of state parks and a regulating body.\footnote{D.T. Kuzmiak, “The American Environmental Movement,” \textit{The Geographic Journal} 157, no. 3 (November 1991): 266.}

The second period of environmentalism, 1933 to 1943, is characterized by the growth in public works projects, large-scale developmental plans, and the emergence of rational planning for resources, also mirrored in Indiana and Michigan’s state parks. Environmentalism during this phase reflected a growing concern for wilderness, which was slowly vanishing as alteration of
natural areas increased. During this time Indiana and Michigan witnessed large scale
development, increasing numbers of visitors, then neglect within state park boundaries.  

The third period of the national environmental movement, a result of the 1960s, was
defined by goals of “security, national economic growth, income redistribution, equal social
opportunity, environmental quality and ecological harmony.” These attitudes were fed by
individuals like conservationist Aldo Leopold in his renowned *A Sand County Almanac* (1949)
and biologist Rachel Carson who wrote the alarm bell *Silent Spring* (1962), which addressed the
threats posed by use of hazardous chemical pesticides and insecticides like DDT. Both Indiana
Dunes and Sterling State Parks were greeted by large crowds of people, dying to “get back to
nature.” Yet, the crowds of people flooding the beaches were apathetic about the parks’ unique
environments, and a lack of state funding reinforced the degradation of facilities and natural
areas. However, as a result of increased awareness caused by the national movement, Indiana
Dunes welcomed its brother, the Indiana Dunes National Lakeshore. Sadly, the 1970s brought
about a decline in environmental awareness, just as Maumee Bay State Park was being created.
Perhaps that was why it took Ohio approximately a decade to complete the park.

Finally, what has been called a fourth period of environmentalism began in the early to
mid-1990s and is ongoing. More recently, especially after the terrorist attacks on 9/11, more and
more money has been allocated to areas of the government other than those protecting natural
resources, thus overshadowing the importance of the state and nation’s limited wilderness.
Additionally, with increased financial strains and implications following the devastation of
Hurricane Katrina, war with Iraq, and inflated gasoline prices, protected natural resources such
as oil found in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge may become exploited for economic gain.

13 Ibid.
14 Ibid.
New consequences of American lifestyles seem to be emerging daily, whether it is depleting Ozone, acid rain, or continual deforestation. During these years, each state park witnessed renovation and rejuvenation, but each is also still struggling to regulate and protect the resources found within. It is up to the federal government and American people to stay conscious of their use to ensure that these resources are available for future generations.\textsuperscript{15}

The ongoing changes to the land claim the last remnants of wilderness as the human desire to get back to nature persists. Transcendentalist Henry David Thoreau clarifies the need to be closer to wilderness, make it more accessible, but suggests that this is wrong—that perhaps Nature is not meant to be claimed or altered by humans. He once wrote:

There is commonly sufficient space about us. Our horizon is never quite at our elbows. The thick wood is not just at our door, nor the pond, but somewhat is always clearing, familiar and worn by us, appropriated and fenced in some way, and reclaimed from Nature. For what reason have I this vast range and circuit, some square miles of unfrequented forest, for my privacy, abandoned to me by men?\textsuperscript{16}

Frederick Jackson Turner’s “frontier” may be gone, but state parks ensure that pieces of it remain. As humans grow aware of the consequences of environmental neglect, exploitation, and destruction, the decrease of limited natural resources becomes apparent and the urgency of protection becomes clear. Most important, these battles are being fought on the state level, as they have been the last 100 years, not just in the well publicized national arena.\textsuperscript{17}

\textsuperscript{15} Ibid, 266-267.
\textsuperscript{17} Frederick Jackson Turner, \textit{The Frontier in American History} (Dover Publications, 1996).
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